



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



WEDNESDAY — 18 JAN 2023

	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	01/18 Day 329 of the Russia invasion 01/18 Helicopter crash outside Kyiv kills 16 01/18 FM: West 'hybrid war' won't stop Russia 01/18 Russia FM: relations w/Arab world on rise 01/18 China's self-inflicted pain 01/18 UK nurses stage new walkout 01/18 Lunar New Year rush starts in China 01/17 Kazakhstan tightens visa rules 01/17 Wagner fighter defects to Norway 01/17 Netherlands Patriot system to Ukraine 01/17 US arms stored in Israel sent to Ukraine 01/17 Chinese scramble for Covid treatment 01/17 Iran military leader threatens US, Israel 01/17 Finland: no rush into NATO w/out Sweden 01/17 New military relationships Indo-Pacific area	01/17 Debt limit threat looms: US run out of cash? 01/17 DOJ rejected Biden documents search role 01/17 El Paso warns of 'unexpected pedestrians' 01/17 Gunfire damages NC power substation 01/17 Polarizing: free speech or out of order? 01/17 Amazon slashes new HR system teams 01/17 Pentagon: no back pay vaccine refusers 01/17 LAPD removes thin blue line flags 01/17 California: first storms, now mudslides 01/17 Calif. deluge subsides as death toll climbs	01/17 Flu, Covid trends in western WA 01/17 Microsoft to cut engineering jobs? 01/17 Downtown Seattle Nike store to close 01/17 SPD exit interviews: money not the issue 01/17 Lynnwood seeks to block opioid clinic site 01/17 Thousands of WA seniors losing insurance 01/17 Fentanyl in record Seattle homeless deaths 01/17 Inflation hits Seattle harder than most cities 01/17 Some homeless view SEA source of shelter 01/17 Bellevue safe parking to those living in cars 01/17 Derogatory Native women site name change
Cyber, Tech Awareness Go to articles	01/18 Free BianLian ransomware decryptor 01/17 Ukraine wants access to ChatGPT 01/17 Earth Bogle group targets Middle East 01/17 Audit: 78% UK schools in cyber incident 01/17 Report: 59M payment card records for sale 01/17 Russia war drives 62% slump stolen cards 01/17 Ransomware attack hits shipping software	01/18 CISA publishes 4 ICS advisories 01/17 FTX: \$415M of crypto hacked 01/17 Nissan North America data breach 01/17 CISA Infrastructure on recent threats 01/17 University of Texas at Austin bans TikTok 01/17 Jan 6 committee probe about social media 01/17 Google search ads push info-steal malware 01/17 'Wacatac' trojan in new supply chain attack	
Terrorism, Extremism Go to articles	01/18 Taliban fear ISKP threats from Pakistan 01/17 Nexus: terrorism, human trafficking 01/17 Iran planning WMD attacks in Europe? 01/17 Al-Shabab attacks Somali military base 01/17 Plight of women under Taliban takeover 01/17 UN blacklists Pakistani militant as terrorist 01/17 Russia: teen jailed in Minecraft 'terror' case	01/17 Govt surveillance power faces questions 01/17 US reaffirms support for UAE against terror	
Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	01/17 World oldest known person dies at 118	01/17 Airports TSA confiscated most guns 01/17 People abandoning pets at airports	01/17 Odd radar signal in eastern WA 01/17 Lawmakers hid messages citing 'privilege'
Crime, Criminals Go to articles	01/18 Trends shaping financial crime in 2023	01/18 Shooter stood over mom, baby: both killed 01/18 Life sentences: slaying of MI security guard 01/17 Study: 31 counties have 42% of US murders 01/17 DOJ cuts companies fines that admit crimes 01/17 Jailed 'El Chapo': 'SOS' to Mexico president 01/17 Idaho murder suspect messaged a victim? 01/17 Man threatens mass shootings at FBI, DHS 01/17 Threats against Congress members decline	01/17 SPD walks back order on DUI suspects 01/17 Shootings result from defund movement? 01/17 Violent crimes Tacoma, Pierce Co. cities up

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Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Gunfire damages NC power substation
SOURCE	https://www.wral.com/gunfire-damages-energyunited-power-substation-in-randolph-county/20676562/
GIST	<p>THOMASVILLE, N.C. — EnergyUnited leaders responded to an alarm Tuesday morning to discover its Pleasant Hill Substation was damaged from an apparent gunshot, according to a news release from the company.</p> <p>The company said its customers who are served by the substation did not experience an outage as a result of the quick response.</p>

“EnergyUnited continually strives to deliver safe, reliable energy to its members,” said EnergyUnited Vice President of Energy Delivery Steve McCachern in a news release. “While we are glad that our members did not experience any service interruptions, we take this matter very seriously and are currently investigating the incident.”

Company leaders called law enforcement upon seeing the damage to the substation.

EnergyUnited spokesperson Maureen Moore said the company could not provide the exact address of the substation due to security reasons.

The Randolph County Sheriff’s Office said it is investigating. The FBI and State Bureau of Investigation are also aware of Tuesday’s incident.

Anyone with information is asked to call the sheriff’s office at 336-318-6658 or CrimeStoppers at 336-672-7463.

It comes after the [Dec. 3, 2022, attack on two electrical substations in Moore County](#), which left more than 40,000 homes and businesses in the dark for several days. Authorities have yet to make an arrest for the person or people responsible for the Moore County attacks.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/18 China’s self-inflicted pain
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/18/briefing/china-population-economy.html
GIST	<p>For years, American politicians have warned that China could challenge the U.S. as the world’s top superpower. As China’s growth regularly outpaced Western rivals, it seemed on track to become the world’s biggest economy.</p> <p>But even the most bullish assessments of China’s rise always anticipated its growth would eventually slow. That slowdown has arrived sooner than expected, as a result of poor decisions by Chinese leadership.</p> <p>Two developments yesterday highlighted the risks for China. Chinese officials announced that the country’s population declined last year for the first time in more than 60 years. They also released data showing that the country’s economy grew only 3 percent last year, well below the government’s target of 5.5 percent.</p> <p>Both these outcomes are closely linked to Chinese policy. Decades-long government efforts to reduce birthrates nationwide, including the policy of allowing most families to have only one child, sped up the population decline. And the economic slowdown is in part tied to the zero-Covid policy that China backed away from only last month, which left the country unprepared to reopen.</p> <p>Stifled growth</p> <p>Experts have long anticipated China’s population decline. Some analysts argue the decline actually started years ago. Regardless, the drop is coming more quickly than expected; previous projections from China and the U.N. suggested the decline would not begin until the next decade.</p> <p>The population is aging rapidly. The median age in China has already surpassed that of the U.S. and could rise above 50 by 2050. Even Europe’s fastest-aging countries are not expected to surpass a median age of 50 until around 2100.</p> <p>To some degree, China is following a typical trajectory: Birthrates tend to drop and median ages tend to rise as countries develop. Birthrates have also dropped in general across East Asia. But China sped up its trajectory with its one-child policy, which began in the late 1970s and was in effect until 2016; its fertility rates are now lower than those in the U.S., Europe and Japan.</p>

China “will no longer be the young, vibrant, growing population,” Wang Feng, an expert on China’s demographic trends at the University of California, Irvine, [told my colleagues Alexandra Stevenson and Zixu Wang](#). “We will start to appreciate China, in terms of its population, as an old and shrinking population.”

The population decline is bad for China’s economic growth. An aging population makes for a weak labor force, and it tends to use more government resources through retirement and health care benefits, as Paul Krugman [explained in Times Opinion](#).

The demographic news comes at a time when economic growth has already slowed in China. Even before yesterday’s announcement, China’s growth had mostly slowed [for more than a decade](#).

The government’s zero-Covid policy worsened the problem by forcing large parts of the country, including economic engines like Shanghai, to abruptly and repeatedly lock down. Now that the policy is lifted, the virus has been spreading rapidly — again hurting China’s economy as sick workers stay home.

In both cases, decisions by Chinese leadership played a central role, stifling China’s potential. This is obviously possible in any country, but it is an especially big risk for China because its authoritarian form of government concentrates power with less public accountability. In the era of Xi Jinping, power has become even more concentrated.

“Where China of the 1980s and 1990s saw real debates over many state policies, party leaders today find themselves compelled to simply parrot Xi Jinping’s own policy line or fall quiet to save their own skins,” said Carl Minzner, senior fellow for China studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Uncertain future

Neither of these developments means that China’s rise is doomed to end. “Modern China, as a phenomenon, is unprecedented, which makes prediction very hard,” said my colleague Max Fisher, who covers international issues. “Anyone who gives you a big, confident, splashy prediction is spinning you.”

China is large enough that it will almost certainly continue to play a significant role on the world stage, and the size of its economy could still surpass that of the U.S. The question is whether China will become a true superpower, one as wealthy and influential as America.

Consider: China’s G.D.P. per capita — measuring its economic worth per person — is less than a fifth of that of the U.S. Chinese individuals are still, on average, much poorer than Americans.

China would not be the first country to fall short of predictions that it would surpass the U.S. In the 1980s, American politicians and pundits feared that Japan would do the same. Japan, in part because of a demographic crisis, did not.

To demonstrate the challenges that China faces to vault past the U.S., Douglas Irwin, an economics professor at Dartmouth College, cited an analogy about learning organic chemistry, a notoriously complex subject. Students could study and master an 800-page textbook on the topic, bringing themselves “close to the frontier of knowledge.” But it would be much more difficult to then write the next edition of that textbook.

“The former is hard enough,” Irwin said. “The latter is impossibly hard.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/18 Russia FM: relations w/Arab world on rise
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/lavrov-says-russias-relations-with-arab-world-are-up-2023-01-18/

GIST	MOSCOW, Jan 18 (Reuters) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday that Moscow was building its relations with the Arab world following the imposition of sweeping Western sanctions against it over Ukraine.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 El Paso warns of 'unexpected pedestrians'
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/us/migrantcrisis-border-immigration/2023/01/17/id/1104804/
GIST	<p>One month after El Paso, Texas, declared a state of emergency due to the ongoing border crisis, signs are popping up telling drivers to "watch for unexpected pedestrians," according to reports.</p> <p>The signs are meant to mitigate an increase in crashes occurring along the border, many of which have since been tied to human trafficking incidents. Just this Tuesday morning, a car carrying nine illegal migrants ran off-road in south-central El Paso.</p> <p>Texas Department of Public Safety spokesman Sgt. Eliot Torres said the crash occurred around 6:55 a.m. MT on Raynolds Street next to the city's University Medical Center, the El Paso Times reported.</p> <p>Another episode recalled by KFOX-TV 14 involved the death of a 12-year-old Mexican girl this weekend. She was reportedly hit and killed by a car while attempting to cross the Border Highway with a group of people.</p> <p>"The incidents that are occurring right with migrants possibly crossing Loop 375 or I-1, that's always been a problem due to the fact that transnational crime organizations do not care about the lives of the migrants," Customs and Border Protection spokesman Carlos Rivera said.</p> <p>"It goes back on us patrolling, us being out there, and us doing our job in order to prevent these tragedies," he continued, qualifying "ultimately, the responsibility of the tragedies that are happening falls on the criminal organizations" which smuggle migrants.</p> <p>In response to the death, Rivera confirmed the CBP would work hard to patrol the area. An additional 10 signs across El Paso's Executive Center, San Marcial, Fonseca, Midway, Padres, and Zaragoza streets will also be planted.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Netherlands Patriot system to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-biden-politics-netherlands-government-united-states-03128d7faeb04340cc8a1421cf6ae42e
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte said Tuesday that his country plans to “join” the U.S. and Germany’s efforts to train and arm Ukraine with advanced Patriot defense systems.</p> <p>Rutte signaled the Netherlands’ intentions at the start of a White House meeting with President Joe Biden. The Dutch defense ministry said that Rutte’s announcement came after Ukraine had asked the Netherlands to provide “Patriot capacity.”</p> <p>“We have the intention to join what you are doing with Germany on the Patriot project,” Rutte told Biden. “I think that it’s important we join that.”</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly address that the Netherlands had agreed to send Ukraine a Patriot battery. “So, there are now three guaranteed batteries. But this is only the beginning. We are working on new solutions to strengthen our air defense,” Zelenskyy said.</p> <p>Rutte, who said he also spoke with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Tuesday about the potential assistance, was more vague about the commitment in his public comments. He told Dutch broadcaster</p>

	<p>NOS that his government is in talks about what exactly it can contribute. The Dutch military has four Patriot systems, one of which is not in service, according to the defense ministry.</p> <p>“The idea is not only training, but also equipment,” Rutte told NOS. He added that the Dutch military is now reviewing “what exactly we have, how can we ensure that it works well with the American and German systems.”</p> <p>He added during a forum at Georgetown University that the decision was a recognition that “we all have to do more” as Ukraine enters a critical phase in the war.</p> <p>Rutte spoke about the potential assistance as Ukrainian troops arrived at Oklahoma’s Fort Sill Army base to begin training on operating and maintaining the Patriot missile defense system. The Patriot is the most advanced surface-to-air missile system the West has provided to Ukraine to help repel Russian aerial attacks.</p> <p>Pentagon spokesman Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said that training will last for several months, and train 90 to 100 Ukrainian troops on how to use the Patriot missile system.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/18 UK nurses stage new walkout
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/england-business-strikes-666ec6b7b15a4a6536c821379a886163
GIST	<p>LONDON (AP) — Thousands of nurses in Britain walked out Wednesday in a new protest over pay, with no end in sight to a wave of strikes that has piled pressure on the U.K.’s overburdened public health system.</p> <p>Two 12-hour strikes on Wednesday and Thursday affect about a quarter of hospitals and clinics in England. Emergency care and cancer treatment will continue, but thousands of appointments and procedures are likely to be postponed.</p> <p>Nurses, ambulance crews, train drivers, airport baggage handlers, border staff, driving instructors, bus drivers and postal workers have all walked off their jobs in recent months to demand higher pay amid a cost-of-living crisis.</p> <p>Inflation in the U.K. hit a 41-year high of 11.1% in October, driven by sharply rising energy and food costs, before easing slightly to 10.5% in December.</p> <p>The nurses’ union has been seeking a pay raise of 5% above inflation, though it has said it will accept a lower offer. The Conservative government argues that double-digit public sector pay increases will drive inflation even higher.</p> <p>“Unaffordable pay hikes will mean cutting patient care and stoking the inflation that would make us all poorer,” Health Secretary Steve Barclay wrote in the Independent newspaper.</p> <p>The government also has angered unions by introducing a bill that will make it harder for key workers to strike by setting “minimum safety levels” for firefighters, ambulance services and railways that must be maintained during a walkout.</p> <p>The Royal College of Nurses union has announced two more strike days next month, when disruption across the economy looks set to intensify. Feb. 1 is shaping up to be the most disruptive day yet, with walkouts by teachers, train drivers, civil servants and university staff. Ambulance staff are due to announce more strike dates later Wednesday.</p> <p>Pat Cullen, head of the Royal College of Nursing, said the union had “extended an olive branch, in fact the whole tree, to government” and urged health officials to “get round a table and let’s stop the strikes so we don’t have to continue this into February.”</p>

	<p>“I would say to the prime minister this morning: If you want to continue to have strikes, then the voice of nursing will continue to speak up on behalf of their patients and that’s exactly what you will get,” she told ITV.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/18 FM: West ‘hybrid war’ won’t stop Russia
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-government-sergey-lavrov-moscow-080ecb54bb9c162ecd8ce5471cf77be4
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (AP) — Russia will achieve its objectives in Ukraine despite a “hybrid war” waged by the West against Moscow, the top Russian diplomat said Wednesday.</p> <p>Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the goals of Moscow’s “special military operation” in Ukraine are “determined by Russia’s core legitimate interests” and will be fulfilled.</p> <p>“There must be no military infrastructure in Ukraine that poses a direct threat to our country,” Lavrov said, adding that Moscow also intends to make sure the rights of ethnic Russians in Ukraine were protected.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin has explained his decision to send troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24 by the need to “demilitarize” and “denazify” Ukraine, to prevent the neighboring country from joining NATO and to protect Russian speakers living there. Ukraine and its Western allies have rejected those arguments as a cover for an unprovoked act of aggression.</p> <p>Speaking at a marathon annual news conference, Lavrov dismissed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s demands for a complete Russian withdrawal from Ukraine. The minister also dismissed Ukraine’s insistence on payments for war damages and the prosecution of war criminals as a platform for future talks, saying “there can be no talks with Zelenskyy.”</p> <p>Lavrov alleged “the West makes all the decisions for Ukraine” with the goal of using the conflict to exhaust Russia. NATO members have provided Ukraine with substantial military aid.</p> <p>“The amount of Western support clearly shows that the West has invested a lot in its war against Russia,” he added. “It’s the West that makes the decisions. And it has made decisions for Ukraine and without Ukraine.”</p> <p>Lavrov asserted that Russia’s action in Ukraine was “our response to a hybrid war unleashed against us” by the West.</p> <p>He said Russia was ready to “seriously consider” any Western initiatives on ending the conflict but added, “We haven’t seen any serious proposals yet.”</p> <p>Any future Russian talks with Western representatives shouldn’t be limited to Ukraine, Lavrov continued.</p> <p>“It makes no sense to talk to the West only about Ukraine,” he said. “The West is using Ukraine to destroy the security system that existed in the Euro-Atlantic region for a long time and hinged on consensus, indivisibility of security and settlement of all issues through dialogue and cooperation.”</p> <p>Lavrov warned that Russia’s showdown with the West over Ukraine was part of global policy shifts that will evolve over a long period.</p> <p>“The process of forming a multipolar world order will be long; it will take an epoch,” he said. “And we are in the middle of that process now.”</p> <p>He cited Western efforts to hamper the widening cooperation between Russia and China, maintaining they would not succeed.</p>

	<p>Lavrov said that Russia's relations with the West "will never be the same." He accused the West of failing to observe signed agreements with Russia.</p> <p>"Never again there will be a situation when you lie, sign documents and then refuse to fulfill them," he said,</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/18 Lunar New Year rush starts in China
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/china-government-beijing-covid-fdbae7dcd0b25acd9aa3c38ef5930c38
GIST	<p>BEIJING (AP) — Hairdresser Wang Lidan is making an emotional Lunar New Year journey from Beijing to her hometown in northeastern China — her first in three years after the government lifted its strict "zero-COVID" policy that kept millions of people at home and sparked protests.</p> <p>The relaxation of restrictions let loose a wave of pent-up travel desire, particularly around China's most important time for family gatherings. Referred to in China as the Spring Festival, it may be the only time of the year when urban workers return to their hometowns.</p> <p>The Chinese government expects over 2.1 billion journeys to be made during a 40-day travel period around New Year's Day, which falls on Sunday.</p> <p>"The restrictions are lifted, which made me relaxed. So I think it's time to go home," Wang said before heading into Beijing Train Station for a trip to Heilongjiang province.</p> <p>In December, China abruptly dropped near-daily coronavirus testing and QR code monitoring of residents after public frustration boiled over into protests in Shanghai and other cities. This month, it dropped most remaining restrictions, including the demand that travelers from overseas must go into lengthy and expensive quarantine.</p> <p>Many local governments had also imposed their own quarantine on travelers from outside the area, and it was those that Wang said had deterred her from leaving Beijing.</p> <p>"If there was an outbreak in Beijing, I would have to be quarantined in my hometown. And when I came back to Beijing, I would be quarantined again," she said.</p> <p>"I would miss the Spring Festival and delay my return to work if I was quarantined twice. So inconvenient!"</p> <p>Hu Jinyuan, from the eastern province of Shandon, had managed to return home each year despite the hassles. He says he plans to continue with regular COVID-19 testing and other safety measures as infections surged and patients flooded hospitals following the lifting of restrictions.</p> <p>"I do nucleic acid tests every now and then. When I arrive in my hometown, I will surely do a test as a way of self-protection. Otherwise I won't know if I'm infected. If I'm infected, I will just isolate myself at home," Hu said.</p> <p>Wang Jingli said he decided to work through the holidays since his company would triple his overtime pay. With the COVID-19 restrictions canceled, his children and wife will visit him in Beijing from their hometown in Henan province.</p> <p>"With the reopening, everyone is very happy about the Spring Festival because we can reunite with our families. But because of my work, I would spend my Spring Festival here in Beijing."</p>

	<p>While Lunar New Year has also become a popular time to travel overseas, airlines are still only gradually restarting international flights and government departments are just beginning to issue or renew travel documents.</p> <p>Many countries have imposed testing requirements on travelers from China that the Foreign Ministry has protested, and worries remain about the spread of the virus in China since containment measures were lifted.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/18 Helicopter crash outside Kyiv kills 16
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/helicopter-crash-ukraine-interior-minister-dead-kyiv-kindergarten-rcna66245
GIST	<p>Ukraine's interior minister and three children were among at least 16 people killed after a helicopter crashed near a kindergarten outside Kyiv on Wednesday, authorities said.</p> <p>The cause of the crash, which comes as the country's war with Russia approaches the 11-month mark, was not immediately clear.</p> <p>At least 9 of those killed had been onboard the emergency services helicopter when it crashed in Brovary, a suburb about 15 miles northeast of the capital, national police head Ihor Klymenko said in a statement.</p> <p>The dead included Ukraine's interior minister, Denys Monastyrsky, his deputy, Yevhen Yenin, and state secretary, Yuri Lubkovich, Klymenko said.</p> <p>Officials had earlier put the death toll at 18, but it was later revised down as authorities stressed the final figure was uncertain.</p> <p>"The pain is unbearable," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said of the death of the three children.</p> <p>"May all those whose lives were taken this black morning rest in peace!" he said in a statement.</p> <p>At least 30 people, including 12 children, were being treated in hospitals, officials said. The extent of their injuries was not immediately clear.</p> <p>The helicopter fell near a kindergarten and a residential building, the head of the Kyiv Regional Military Administration Oleksii Kuleba said.</p> <p>"At the time of the tragedy, children and employees of the institution were in the kindergarten. At this point, everyone was evacuated," Kuleba said.</p> <p>Video and photos shared online by Ukrainian officials showed flames bursting from at least one building as smoke billowed up from the crash site.</p> <p>The Security Service of Ukraine said on its Telegram channel that it was considering at least three possible causes for the crash, including malfunction, a violation of flight rules or "deliberate actions to destroy the vehicle."</p> <p>Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said he had ordered a special commission to be created to lead an investigation into the circumstances of the incident.</p> <p>Yurii Ihnat, spokesperson for Ukraine's Air Force Command, said the commission would include a number of aviation experts. "It is too early to talk about the causes of the crash," Ihnat said, speaking during a national telethon.</p>

A senior police official in the Kharkiv region said the helicopter was due to travel to the area in the country's northeast when it crashed.

There has been no fighting reported around Kyiv for months, since Russian forces pulled back from the region after a failed assault on the capital.

Officials in Ukraine and across Europe paid tribute to the dead.

"Tragedy far from the frontline, in Brovary," foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Twitter.

"I wish a speedy recovery to those injured. Denys Monastyrskyi and Yevhenii Yenin were close colleagues & friends of mine, true Ukrainian patriots. Huge loss for all of us," he said.

Shmyhal, the prime minister, said it was "a great loss for the government team and the entire state."

"My sincere condolences to the families of all the victims," he said.

"My colleagues, my friends. What a tragic loss," interior ministry adviser Anton Gerashchenko wrote in a tweet. "Deepest condolences to their families."

Olena Zelenska, Ukraine's first lady, could also be seen dabbing away tears Wednesday morning before attending a World Economic Forum session in Davos, Switzerland, according to The Associated Press.

Forum President Borge Brende asked for 15 seconds of silence after opening the session to honor the Ukrainian officials killed in the crash.

The U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Bridget A. Brink, said on Twitter that she was "shocked and saddened by the terrible news from Brovary."

Charles Michel, president of the European Council, remembered Monastyrsky as a "great friend of the EU."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Iran military leader threatens US, Israel
SOURCE	https://freebeacon.com/national-security/iranian-military-leader-threatens-destruction-of-us-and-israel/
GIST	<p>An Iranian military leader said on Tuesday that the Islamic Republic is strengthening its military infrastructure and will soon oversee the destruction of Israel and the United States.</p> <p>Brigadier General Ali Fadavi, the deputy commander in chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Tehran's chief terrorism force, said that "very soon" the world "will witness the destruction of the Zionist regime." Iran, he said, is equipping Palestinian militant groups such as Hamas to wage war against Israel. "The Zionists," Fadavi said, "are taking actions under the guidance of the United States, but soon the great Satan [the United States] will also be destroyed."</p> <p>Fadavi's remarks come as Iran amplifies its threats to attack Israel and the United States amid a breakdown in diplomatic talks between the hardline regime and Biden administration. Nationwide protests in Iran also have challenged the clerical government's grip on power, with dissidents taking to the streets to demand regime change. The Iranian government has reacted to the protests with violence, including by killing protest movement leaders. These actions have been punctuated by a more hardline foreign policy stance against Israel and the United States, which Iran sees as fueling the protest movement.</p> <p>The IRGC, which is responsible for killing hundreds of Americans, is not only supporting Palestinian militant groups, Fadavi said, but also amassing the military might needed for a strike against the United States and Israel.</p>

	<p>"What our enemies know about us is little, and they will truly understand when we use our power against them," Fadavi said in comments carried by Iran's state-controlled press.</p> <p>Fadavi also praised Iranian general Qassem Soleimani—who was killed in a 2020 drone strike ordered by then-U.S. president Donald Trump—for his efforts to arm various Palestinian factions.</p> <p>The IRGC leader's threats came on the same day his military group conducted large-scale war drills in the Persian Gulf, an area where Iran frequently harasses U.S. military vessels. The IRGC navy reportedly tested "advanced missiles and combat drones," as well as "high-tech military weapons" and "naval cruise missile systems" during these exercises.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 Finland: no rush into NATO w/out Sweden
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/davos2023/card/finland-pm-says-country-won-t-rush-into-nato-without-sweden-iBPAKSJLVNF07XyudIXM
GIST	<p>Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said her country would enter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization simultaneously with Sweden, even though Finland doesn't face the same resistance from Turkey over its application to the alliance.</p> <p>“From our perspective, it’s important that Finland and Sweden are going to NATO together, because we are sharing the same security environment,” Ms. Marin said Tuesday at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland.</p> <p>Finland and Sweden applied for NATO membership last year following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, in a historic reversal of security policy for both countries. Every NATO member has approved their entry, except for Turkey and Hungary.</p> <p>Hungarian officials have said they would send the matter to parliament early this year. Turkey has objected due to what it says are Swedish ties to Kurdish militant groups considered terrorist groups by the U.S. and the EU.</p> <p>Amid intensifying Western attempts to get Turkey to drop its opposition to the two Nordic countries’ NATO applications, a top aide to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan last week said his government was unlikely to seek parliamentary approval to let them into NATO before Turkey’s national election later this year.</p> <p>Ms. Marin said she had spoken personally with Mr. Erdogan, who told her that he had no major issue with Finland’s entry into NATO, only with Sweden.</p> <p>The two countries signed an agreement with Turkey in June to resolve the dispute through a security dialogue, and dropped barriers to arms sales to Ankara. Sweden in November amended its constitution to make it easier to pass counterterrorism laws.</p> <p>“I think the process should have been faster. Finland and Sweden, we both tick all the boxes when it comes to NATO,” Ms. Marin said. “We have discussed and agreed in NATO’s member summit about the steps that we would take, and we have taken those steps,” she said.</p> <p>The prime minister, who faces a re-election battle later this year, said Western countries could have prevented a war in Ukraine if they had confronted Russia with stronger sanctions following the 2014 invasion of Crimea, and had been willing to let Ukraine join NATO.</p> <p>“I’m sure if Ukraine [had been] a member of NATO, there wouldn’t be a war now in Ukraine,” Ms. Marin said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 Kazakhstan tightens visa rules
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/17/kazakhstan-visas-russia-war-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Kazakhstan has changed its entry rules for foreigners, in a move that is expected to make entering and staying in the country much harder for Russians fleeing military conscription and other repercussions of President Vladimir Putin’s war against Ukraine.</p> <p>Under the new rules, expected to come into force later this month, visitors who do not require a visa because they come from countries in the Eurasian Economic Union, which includes Russia, will be prohibited from staying in Kazakhstan for more than 90 days in a 180-day period.</p> <p>Kazakhstan became one of the main destinations for Russians fleeing after Putin announced a partial military mobilization in September, which conscripted 300,000 reinforcements to fight in Ukraine.</p> <p>According to Kazakhstan’s Interior Ministry, about 100,000 Russians arrived in the country in the first six days following Putin’s Sept. 21 mobilization announcement. Many Russians then left Kazakhstan for other destinations, but the new rules seem intended to force those who have stayed to obtain residence permits.</p> <p>The new restrictions will target visitors who previously circumvented Kazakhstan’s migration rules through what are called visa runs — by crossing Kazakhstan’s borders and returning immediately, effectively resetting the clock on the 90-day maximum visa-free stay.</p> <p>Foreigners who arrived in Kazakhstan with a visa or who were issued temporary residence permits will not be affected by the new rules.</p> <p>“This measure will affect the Russians the most,” Dionis Cenusa, a political analyst affiliated with the Eastern Europe Studies Center, a Lithuania-based think tank, wrote on Twitter. “This revision of the visa-free regime will make it possible to prevent the prolonged stay of Russians without a residence permit in Kazakhstan.”</p> <p>Cenusa said he believed the Kazakh government was working to prevent Russian migrants from becoming a burden on public resources. “If they are not integrated into the legal and labor sphere, they could become a future social problem,” he wrote.</p> <p>It was unclear if the Kremlin had any role in requesting the changes.</p> <p>Moscow has faced questions recently about how to handle a historic outflow of its citizens that began even before the military mobilization, as Western sanctions over the war started making life uncomfortable — curtailing flights to international destinations and cutting off many financial transactions.</p> <p>In October, Kazakhstan’s Central Bank reported that the volume of money transfers from Russia to Kazakhstan had increased 13 times compared with the same period a year earlier.</p> <p>Vyacheslav Volodin, the speaker of the State Duma, Russia’s lower house of parliament, recently suggested punishing Russians who had left the country and criticized the war, potentially by confiscating their property. “The scoundrels who have left live comfortably thanks to our country,” Volodin posted on his Telegram channel.</p> <p>But the Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, urged caution. “They are all our citizens, all equally, and all could have different reasons for leaving,” Peskov said, according to the Tass news agency. He added, “This is a very difficult topic.”</p> <p>Kazakhstan was traditionally one of Russia’s closest allies. But since the invasion of Ukraine, Kazakhstan has signaled its desire for distance from Moscow and to pursue closer ties with China, Turkey and the West. In recent months, Kazakh officials have become more outspoken on the war in Ukraine.</p>

	<p>While Russia has sought to put pressure on Europe's oil and gas supplies, Astana has made moves to expand its energy cooperation with the European Union and the West. And in several votes about the war at the United Nations, Kazakhstan chose to abstain rather than side with Russia.</p> <p>And in June, during the annual St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said that his country did not intend to recognize the independence of the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics in eastern Ukraine, breakaway states loyal to Moscow.</p> <p>More recently, Tokayev has condemned Putin's claimed annexation of four regions of Ukraine.</p> <p>As waves of Russians entered Kazakhstan in the wake of the September mobilization, Tokayev not only promised to provide them humanitarian assistance but said publicly that those fleeing had been forced to leave Russia due to a "hopeless situation."</p> <p>But Tuesday's announcement of the new entry restrictions appeared to mark a bit of calibration, with Tokayev potentially adopting a more cautious approach.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 Pentagon: no back pay vaccine refusers
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2023-01-17/pentagon-no-back-pay-to-troops-discharged-for-refusing-covid-19-vaccine
GIST	<p>The Pentagon on Tuesday shut down speculation it's considering back pay for service members it discharged for refusing to get a COVID-19 vaccine, distancing itself from an already politically hazardous issue that has become even more prejudicial for the military with Republican control of Congress.</p> <p>"Right now, we are not pursuing, as a matter of policy, back pay for those who refused the vaccine," Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, a spokesman for the Defense Department, told reporters in response to one of several questions about the issue.</p> <p>"At the time those orders were refused, it was a lawful order," Ryder added.</p> <p>He spoke a week after the Pentagon formally rescinded the policy that required all troops to receive the shots with very few exemptions, in line with new legislation signed into law on Dec. 23 that forced the change. Politico had reported on Friday, citing an unnamed spokesperson, that the department was considering issuing back pay at that time. Ryder on Tuesday distanced the Pentagon from any such speculation.</p> <p>Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in announcing the congressionally mandated repeal was unapologetic for the policy, saying in a memo on Jan. 10 that he is "deeply proud for the Department's work to combat the coronavirus disease," which he said "will leave a lasting legacy in the many lives we saved." He cited the orders from Congress that he change the policy, said no further service members would be discharged for refusing the vaccine and announced that any troops under existing investigation or judicial process would be cleared.</p> <p>It remains unclear the extent to which the department would allow service members who have been discharged to rejoin. However, Tuesday's statements following Austin's memo align with a general air in the department of disinterest in further accommodating those affected by the policy.</p> <p>Roughly 99% of all active-duty troops received the vaccine. More than 8,400 service members were discharged from the military for refusing to take it. All of those kicked out of military service received at least a "general discharge under honorable conditions," with others receiving the higher "honorable discharge." The difference affects medical and other benefits service members receive after leaving the military.</p>

Republicans in Congress [raised almost immediate alarm](#) after Austin first announced the policy in August 2021, followed by a series of deadlines that each department determined for itself, beginning with the Air Force and Space Force at the beginning of November that year.

Then-Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, the top ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee at the time, expressed particular concern that November that he did not believe the military had a clear understanding of how the mandate would affect the military at a time several branches, particularly the Army, were already suffering from dramatic recruitment shortfalls.

Those concerns accelerated in the new Congress when the House succeeded in adding the policy overturn in the latest defense budget, which some Democrats eventually endorsed to ensure the bill's passage.

Republican members centered particularly on an assertion that the vaccine mandate – like other so-called “woke” policies – contributed to massive military recruitment deficits, particularly acute in the Army, which missed its 2022 goals by 25%. The Pentagon says [no data exists](#) supporting a link between the two issues.

“Look, I’ve been vaccinated and I’ve had COVID. ... I’ll recommend from my point of view you get vaccinated,” Sen. Lindsey Graham, South Carolina Republican, said at a press conference with other members of his party in December. “We’re having a dilemma, and that’s finding people to serve in the military. Our recruiting goals are way short. The conflict in the world is getting worse, not better. We need more people in the military, not less.”

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California, then the top-ranked Republican in the House, tweeted at the time that the military vaccine mandate was “wrong.”

"Our heroes have been fired. Our country is less safe. I told the President directly – it's time to end the mandate and rehire our service members," McCarthy said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 LAPD removes thin blue line flags
SOURCE	https://www.police1.com/police-administration/articles/lapd-removes-thin-blue-line-flags-from-stations-after-receiving-complaint-8EPx4dan3qb8bhuv/
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Police Department will no longer display the thin blue line flag inside station lobbies after a community member reportedly issued a complaint labeling the flag a representation of “extremist views.”</p> <p>According to FOX 11 Los Angeles, the flag was originally placed over the front desk of the Rampart Station, but now only the U.S. flag will be displayed in station lobbies. LAPD Chief Michel Moore expressed that although he views the flag from a different perspective than the complainant does, he said the flag's "display in our public lobbies can be divisive."</p> <p>"It's unfortunate that extremist groups have hijacked the use of the thin blue line flag to symbolize their undemocratic, racist and bigoted views. Flags serve as powerful symbols with specific meanings. The thin blue line flag, to me, presents the honor, valor, dedication and sacrifice of law enforcement to protect our communities. Tragically, that view is not universally held and others have been able to persuade the public it symbolizes racist, bigoted and oppressive values," Moore said in a statement.</p> <p>Despite the change, the chief said employees and staff are still allowed to have the thin blue line flag in their workspace, locker door and personal vehicles. Memorials for fallen officers will also be authorized in all public spaces, according to the report.</p> <p>"Given our lobbies should be places that people feel safe, free of political ideology and welcoming, it remains our long-standing policy that only official items be displayed," Moore's statement continued.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Calif. deluge subsides as death toll climbs
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/17/california-storm-death-toll-deluge-subside
GIST	<p>Sunshine beamed across parts of California on Tuesday, signaling a hopeful end to extreme downpours that drenched the Golden State. The nine powerful atmospheric rivers that bore down in quick succession over the last three weeks – dropping an estimated 24.5tn gallons of water across California from 26 December to 11 January – left death and disaster in their wake.</p> <p>At least 20 people have been killed during the deluges, as the severe storms submerged streets, produced fast-moving flash floods and tore into inundated hillsides that sent mud sliding onto homes and highways. Along with torrents of rain, blustery winds ripped down trees and power lines, leaving hundreds of thousands without electricity during the storms.</p> <p>President Joe Biden issued a major disaster declaration in three California communities hit hard by the storms, freeing important federal aid that will help with cleanup and recovery.</p> <p>Biden is scheduled to visit parts of the central coast on Thursday, to tour impacted areas and meet with first responders. Along with Santa Cruz, Sacramento, and Merced counties – the three designated as major disasters – 41 of California’s 58 counties have been given federal emergency declarations, and Governor Gavin Newsom proclaimed a statewide emergency.</p> <p>The cost of the catastrophe is estimated to far-exceed \$1bn, making the series of storms the first billion dollar-disaster of 2023. But, even as the clouds cleared this week, there’s another storm swirling over the Pacific that could gain enough strength to become California’s tenth atmospheric river. A shot of precipitation from a quick system was also predicted for Wednesday or Thursday, the National Weather Service said.</p> <p>Forecasters cautioned that although the midweek rainfall will be light, it could still cause problems across the sodden state. Overly saturated soils and systems, overwhelmed by moisture after months of dryness, will not be able to withstand more water, as tens of thousands remained under evacuation orders on Monday.</p> <p>“With more difficult days ahead, it’s critical that Californians stay alert to conditions in their area and follow guidance from local emergency responders to stay safe,” Newsom said in a news release about preparation for the next round of rain.</p> <p>As some communities across California brace for more, others are using the dry reprieve to begin the arduous cleanup process. The state saw more than 500 landslides since New Year’s Eve according to the California Geological Survey, and many transportation corridors remain closed or slowed due to the damage and debris.</p> <p>By Monday, two northbound lanes of Interstate 5 near Castaic in northern LA county were closed indefinitely after a hillside collapsed, and in Berkeley, 10 homes were evacuated Monday when a sodden hillside collapsed, sending mud onto properties. Dozens of residents of Matilija Canyon in Ventura county, whose homes are tucked into a remote hillside in Los Padres National Forest had to be rescued by helicopter after “towering piles of rock and mud” collapsed last week, covering the single road exit out of the canyon, Ventura county sheriff’s office said.</p> <p>“When I found the mud was coming into my yard, that’s when I got scared,” resident Brian Briggs told the LA Times, describing a harrowing 36-hour battle to protect his home and neighbors during the deluge. “When we got off the helicopter, it finally hit me, and I broke down sobbing.”</p> <p>The severe and destructive storms that delivered a year’s worth of rain in mere weeks in some areas did do some good in the drought-stricken state, filling badly depleted reservoirs and securing a strong snowbank that will provide moisture for the thirsty landscapes through the spring and summer months as it melts.</p>

	<p>But the deluge was not enough to end the drought, which developed over years. The cycle of extreme weather that vacillates dangerously from wet to dry is a symptom of the climate crisis that models show will only grow more intense as the world warms.</p> <p>For now though, Californian's are welcoming the chance to bask. There's been little time to dry since the start of the year. "Wondering what that bright object in the sky is?" the NWS in Sacramento tweeted playfully on Monday, "It's the Sun!"</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/18 Day 329 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/18/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-329-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A search and rescue operation in the rubble of Saturday's Russian missile strike on an apartment building in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro has been completed, authorities said. The death toll currently stands at 45, including a child, the head of the Dnipropetrovsk region military administration said. At least 19 people are still missing and a further 79 people injured, according to local officials. A makeshift memorial has appeared in Moscow to commemorate the victims of the Russian missile attack. • The Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych has tendered his resignation after a public outcry over comments he made suggesting the Russian missile that struck the building in Dnipro had been shot down by Ukraine. The Ukrainian air force says the apartment complex was hit by a Russian Kh-22 missile, which Kyiv does not have the equipment to shoot down. • Russia has announced it will make "major changes" to its armed forces from 2023-26, promising to shake up its military structure after months of setbacks on the battlefield in Ukraine. In addition to administrative changes, the defence ministry said it would strengthen the combat capabilities of its naval, aerospace and strategic missile forces. The Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said the changes had been made necessary by the "proxy war" being conducted in Ukraine by the west. • More than 9,000 civilians, including 453 children, have been killed in Ukraine since Russia's invasion last February according to Ukraine. Andriy Yermak, the head of the Ukrainian presidential staff, said at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss resort of Davos, "We will not forgive a single [act of] torture or life taken. Each criminal will be held accountable." • Ukraine's top general, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, spoke to his US counterpart, General Mark Milley, face to face near the Ukraine-Poland border for the first time. Milley, who is the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met for a couple of hours with Zaluzhnyi at an undisclosed location in south-eastern Poland on Tuesday. The pair have talked frequently over the past year but had never met. • Ukraine has urged world leaders to intensify efforts to remove Vladimir Putin's troops from its soil as its war with Russia dominated the first full day of the gathering of the global elite in Davos. With the war clouding the outlook for the global economy in 2023, Ukraine's deputy prime minister Yuliia Svyrydenko urged allies to step up supplies of military hardware so Russia could be more quickly defeated. Ukraine's first lady, Olena Zelenska, used a special address to demand that those attending the World Economic Forum used their influence to end Russia's aggression. • German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Tuesday picked little-known Boris Pistorius to be Germany's new defence minister, putting him in charge of steering the armed forces through an era of momentous change. The appointment follows the resignation of Christine Lambrecht at a crucial time for the ministry, with Germany under intense pressure to send battle tanks to Ukraine. • The Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, has told Joe Biden that the Netherlands will offer Patriot missiles to Ukraine. The Netherlands will join the US and Germany in sending the Patriot missile defence system to Ukraine, Rutte told Biden at the White House. Biden thanked Rutte for being "very very stalwart" on its support for Ukraine. • The UK foreign secretary, James Cleverly, has justified the supply of Challenger tanks to Ukraine, saying it was designed to bring the war to a quick conclusion and there was a moral imperative to end the war soon due to the casualties and cost. His remarks seemed designed to encourage the US to step up its own weapons supply.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finland is prepared to support Ukraine for “as long as needed”, its prime minister, Sanna Marin, said. “I think the only message that we need to send is that we will support Ukraine as long as needed. One year, two years, five years, 10 years, 15 years,” Marin said at Davos. • The British defence minister, Ben Wallace, will join counterparts from Poland and the Baltic countries in Estonia to mount a final attempt to put pressure on Germany to authorise sending Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine this week. Defence sources said a purpose of the meeting on Thursday was “to encourage the Germans” if no decision had been made by Berlin before then. • The EU executive has confirmed it is releasing €3bn in emergency aid for Ukraine, the first tranche of an €18bn fund intended to help run essential public services during winter. The money will pay public sector wages, pensions and keep schools and hospitals running, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said at Davos. • A former commander with the Russian mercenary Wagner Group who last week sought asylum in Norway has spoken of how he is “scared for his life”. Andrey Medvedev, 26, said in an interview last month with the Guardian that in Ukraine he had witnessed the summary killing of Wagner fighters accused by their own commanders of disobeying orders. • Serbia’s president has called on Russia to stop recruiting Serbs to fight alongside its Wagner Group in Ukraine. Aleksandar Vučić criticised Russian websites and social media groups for publicising adverts in the Serbian language calling for volunteers to join its ranks. He denied reports the Wagner Group had a presence in Serbia, where pro-Kremlin and ultranationalist organisations have supported the invasion of Ukraine.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 DOJ rejected Biden documents search role
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/justice-department-considered-but-rejected-role-in-biden-documents-search-11673991364?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The Justice Department considered having FBI agents monitor a search by President Biden’s lawyers for classified documents at his homes but decided against it, both to avoid complicating later stages of the investigation and because Mr. Biden’s attorneys had quickly turned over a first batch and were cooperating, according to people familiar with the matter.</p> <p>After Mr. Biden’s lawyers discovered documents marked as classified dating from his term as vice president at an office he used at a Washington-based think tank on Nov. 2, the Justice Department opened an inquiry into why and how they got there. Mr. Biden’s legal team prepared to search his other properties for any similar documents, and discussed with the Justice Department the prospect of having FBI agents present while Mr. Biden’s lawyers conducted the additional searches.</p> <p>Instead, the two sides agreed that Mr. Biden’s personal attorneys would inspect the homes, notify the Justice Department as soon as they identified any other potentially classified records, and arrange for law-enforcement authorities to take them.</p> <p>Those deliberations, which haven’t previously been reported, shed new light on how the Biden team’s efforts to cooperate with investigators have thus far helped it avoid more aggressive actions by law enforcement.</p> <p>In the week since news reports first surfaced about the documents, the incident has drawn parallels to the discovery of a much larger number of documents at former President Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago home in Florida, which federal agents obtained a warrant to search in August after more than a year of negotiations between Mr. Trump’s lawyers, the National Archives and the Justice Department and after Mr. Trump’s lawyers said all documents had been returned.</p> <p>Mr. Trump’s supporters have accused the Justice Department of a double standard in treatment; Mr. Biden’s supporters have pointed to the president’s legal team’s cooperation and swift moves to inform the Justice Department of the documents’ discovery as a key difference. Mr. Biden has said he doesn’t know what the documents are or how they wound up at his office at the Penn Biden Center or his Delaware</p>

home. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was director of the Washington think tank from 2017 to 2019, told reporters on Tuesday that he was unaware that government documents had been stored there.

The discussions and the Justice Department's willingness to let the Biden lawyers do the searches unsupervised also suggest federal investigators are girding for a monthslong inquiry that could stretch well into Mr. Biden's third year in office.

One reason not to involve the FBI at an early stage: That way the Justice Department would preserve the ability to take a tougher line, including executing a future search warrant, if negotiations ever turned hostile, current and former law-enforcement officials said.

Representatives of the FBI and Justice Department declined to comment. In a call to reporters about the investigation, White House spokesman Ian Sams said the president and his team were cooperating fully with the special counsel review "so that it can proceed swiftly and thoroughly."

The White House revealed on two separate days last week that [documents had been located](#) at the president's Delaware residence, as well as those found at a garage there in December. Part of the reason the new documents were revealed separately is that Mr. Biden's personal attorneys don't have security clearances to handle classified documents and had to set aside any material that could qualify as such. Richard Sauber, special counsel to Mr. Biden, who has that clearance, accompanied Justice Department personnel to retrieve documents, when they discovered additional pages with classification markings.

Attorney General Merrick Garland last week assigned a former top prosecutor in the Trump administration, Robert Hur, [to serve as special counsel](#) investigating the discovery of the documents in the locales associated with Mr. Biden. Justice Department officials were concerned that an FBI presence as the Biden team hunted for documents could complicate investigators' ability to execute search warrants or subpoena documents as the investigation proceeds, some of the people said, in a sign that investigators are considering the possibility of a grand jury investigation into the matter.

Mr. Hur is expected to begin his job as special counsel by the end of the month, after he winds down his work as a defense lawyer at the law firm Gibson Dunn, people familiar with his appointment said.

Soon after the initial discovery in November, Mr. Garland tasked the Trump-appointed U.S. attorney in Chicago, John Lausch, with reviewing the documents, with an eye toward determining whether a special counsel should be appointed.

Mr. Lausch told Mr. Garland on Jan. 5 that he thought a special counsel was warranted given the many unanswered questions about the documents, and Mr. Garland quickly agreed, the people said.

Mr. Hur is expected to grapple with legally and politically thorny considerations that could be reminiscent of those from the last special counsel related to a sitting president, potentially including whether to pursue in-person testimony from Mr. Biden. During the 2017-19 special counsel inquiry led by Robert Mueller into Russia's interference in the 2016 campaign and any links between that effort and the Trump campaign, investigators tried for more than a year to interview then-President Trump before ultimately settling for written testimony.

Mr. Sams declined to say whether Mr. Biden would sit for an interview with the special counsel if asked. Legal experts said an open-book strategy could help shorten Mr. Hur's inquiry and keep it from dragging out over Mr. Biden's presidency.

"My goal would be to get everybody interviewed by Robert Hur as quickly as possible—not throw up roadblocks, not assert privileges, and get this thing over with," said Neil Eggleston, who served as White House counsel in the Obama administration.

The Justice Department investigation into the Biden documents comes as [another special counsel](#) is already deep into a parallel inquiry into the classified documents at Mr. Trump's Florida home.

The FBI in August executed a search warrant at the property, believing more such documents remained there based on witness interviews and security-camera footage. They removed dozens of boxes containing additional documents, many of which were mixed in with clothing and news clippings. Prosecutors later disclosed they were investigating [whether anyone sought to obstruct their inquiry](#), in addition to whether anyone should be prosecuted for mishandling the documents. Mr. Trump has called the Justice Department's moves a witch hunt and said he did nothing wrong.

The Justice Department has sought to keep the two inquiries separate by assigning them to different teams, according to people familiar with the matter. The Biden White House has highlighted differences between the two inquiries, stressing in particular how their cooperative stance compares to the Trump team's resistance to turn over records to the National Archives after repeated requests. Mr. Trump's legal team later [clashed](#) with the Justice Department over the appointment of an outside arbiter, known as a special master, to review documents seized from Mar-a-Lago.

Yet the Biden team's bumpy rollout of its discoveries—it only confirmed the document discoveries after news reports and has offered few new details—complicates its attempt to draw a hard distinction between Mr. Biden's actions and those of Mr. Trump, said John Fishwick, who served as the U.S. attorney for the Western District of Virginia during the Obama administration.

"He is the sitting president, there's no reason for him to hold back anything about this," Mr. Fishwick said. "It makes it harder to say it's apples and oranges, and it undercuts the argument that you were different."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Plight of women under Taliban takeover
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/killing-of-former-afghanistan-lawmaker-highlights-plight-of-women-under-taliban-11673969588?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>The killing of a former lawmaker in her home has shocked Afghans and drawn attention to the lack of protection for women in the country as the Taliban continue to impose strict limitations on their rights, pushing them further out of public life.</p> <p>Mursal Nabizada, who was shot dead in her home in the early hours of Sunday by "unknown, armed individuals," according to Kabul police, was one of a few female members of parliament who stayed in Kabul after the Taliban took control of the country in August 2021.</p> <p>In the months after the Taliban takeover, she had been a rare, vocal critic of the new Taliban administration, which she accused of imprisoning Afghan women at home with draconian laws and social restrictions.</p> <p>Kabul police said Ms. Nabizada, who was 29, had been killed by gunmen who entered her house but declined to give further details while an investigation was ongoing. A bodyguard was killed alongside her. Her brother and a second bodyguard were injured in the incident, while a third bodyguard fled with jewelry and money, police said.</p> <p>The killing of Ms. Nabizada is a dramatic display of the deteriorating living conditions for Afghan women under the Taliban, according to women's rights activists who say the new government has failed to protect women and allowed for a widespread culture of violence and impunity. In recent months, the Taliban have sharply curtailed Afghan women's rights and freedoms with a raft of edicts aimed at limiting their participation in public life. Women have been barred from high schools and universities, and from many professions.</p>

International and local nongovernmental organizations have been [ordered not to use female staff](#), prompting some of them to fully or partly suspend operations crucial to alleviating a dire humanitarian crisis that has gripped the country since the Taliban takeover.

Women have been banned from public parks and gyms, and are obliged to wear a headscarf and face covering such as medical masks in public places. They must bring a [male chaperone](#) to travel more than short distances, as well as to perform many simple tasks such as going to medical clinics.

Ms. Nabizada's death also highlights what human rights advocates say is a widespread culture of impunity under the Taliban. More than 600 civilians, including former members of the Afghan security forces and opposition figures, were killed between August 2021 and November 2022 in "targeted attacks and under suspicious circumstances" in the country's five most affected provinces, according to Afghan human rights organization Rawadari.

The culprits were either Taliban forces or unknown individuals, yet none of the killings were properly investigated by the Taliban, said Shaharзад Akbar, executive director of Rawadari.

"It's a very frightening environment," Ms. Akbar said of Ms. Nabizada's killing. "Women like her are more vulnerable than before because the authorities won't investigate and there is complete impunity," she added. "It sends a chilling message to women in a similar position—and there are women in a similar position still inside the country—about what's next."

The Taliban said they were investigating the case but declined to comment further.

Ms. Nabizada was elected to parliament in 2019 to occupy one of the 69 seats in parliament, or 27%, reserved for women under the previous government.

After the Taliban took power, most female members of parliament were evacuated from the country, many with the help of nonprofits. Ms. Nabizada chose to stay, but recently felt endangered, according to people who knew her.

"Her hope was that the Taliban had changed, and she would be able to work," said Fawzia Koofi, another female ex-lawmaker who was evacuated from Kabul after the Taliban takeover, and is now based in the U.K. "She was texting me recently that she wanted to leave, and wanted my help to put her in touch with organizations and countries that could support her."

Hours after the killing of Ms. Nabizada became known, Ms. Koofi said another female former lawmaker inside Afghanistan told her that she was worried she would be next.

"You add the Taliban pressure to the culture of impunity and it makes Afghan women very vulnerable," Ms. Koofi said. "Not only are women being erased from political and social life, but physically, too."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 SPD exit interviews: money not the issue
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3778599/money-not-issue-departing-seattle-police-department-officers-confirm/
GIST	<p>In exclusively obtained Seattle Police Department (SPD) exit interviews, departing officers doubled down on the well-documented pressures the department is facing both internally and externally, with multiple references to the city and its elected officials, local media, inner-department toxicity, and lack of career development as reasons to flee the Emerald City.</p> <p>"I used to be proud to say I worked for SPD. I can't say that anymore," a recently retired detective wrote. "The homeless and drug addicts get more support than the officers/detectives get."</p> <p>Of all the reasons to leave, compensation was one of the few bright spots of being a police officer in Seattle.</p>

In a question titled: “Do you consider the salary you received to be competitive?” 60% of the exit interviews responded with a yes, or similar answer. Of the 40% unsatisfied with their pay, half stated it was unsatisfactory only when considering the extra hurdles Seattle provided police.

“The salary was competitive with other agencies, but it is not commensurate to the workload and challenges that come with a city the size of Seattle, relative to other agencies within the state,” one officer wrote in response.

Yet, back in Aug. 2022, the Seattle City Council decided — in a 6-3 vote — to add additional financial incentives to recruit more officers. The approved legislation allowed SPD to spend an extra \$289,000 on hiring bonuses in 2022, in addition to the \$1.5 million already approved earlier in May.

New recruits to the SPD are eligible for hiring bonuses of up to \$30,000 — as long as they are employed within the department for at least five years.

“There are things that won’t be solved by the police,” said Councilmember Tammy Morales, one of the three votes against the hiring bonus plan. “Our homelessness crisis, our need for more affordable housing, our limited access to behavioral healthcare.”

Teresa Mosqueda and Kshama Sawant were the two other votes against police hiring bonuses.

Over the past two-and-a-half years, the loss of more than 400 police officers has depleted the SPD to the point where essential services cannot be delivered promptly and effectively, according to the [SPD Recruitment and Retention Plan](#). As of May 2022, the number of trained and deployable officers — 954 — was the lowest in over 30 years.

With 60% of the released exit interviews being retirements instead of resignations, the department and city officials are expected to closely examine their recruiting process.

A [November report](#) from the [Police Executive Research Forum](#) (PERF) asserted that police departments and agencies across the country have poorly funded both the recruiting and training processes for officers. Retirements and resignations increased by 45% and 18% nationwide, respectively, while hiring is down 5%, according to PERF.

For many officers, according to the exit interviews, the summer of 2020 changed the department’s view of the city just as much as the city changed its view of the department.

“I’ve enjoyed helping people as a police officer, but with staffing, it became very difficult to do the job,” a detective who was on the force for 20 years wrote. “Morale was just so low. It was hard to just get into the car to go to work. I felt that the department did not fight hard enough to defend officers after the riots. And now department personnel is depleted, and officer detectives are paying for that.”

“The way we always settle,” responded a former officer to the question: ‘What factors had a negative impact on the department?’ But the list didn’t end there.

“Local civilian stakeholders. Councilperson Sawant and her ilk. The city council. Local and national press. The city’s law department,” the officer continued. “The judiciary’s insane judgments in recent years that make policing nearly impossible and drive personal liability through the roof. The state Legislature. The governor.”

Approximately 42% of the police officers exiting Seattle cited local government as the main reason for leaving, with the city council, King County Prosecutors Office, the local media, Mayor Bruce Harrell, Governor Jay Inslee, and anyone involved with the “[Defund the Police](#)” movement mentioned in multiple different interviews.

“Move the department to a different city,” an officer wrote with a smiley face. “The greater [Seattle] area does not realize what a diverse, reasonable, knowledgeable, well-rounded department it is, allowing it to evaporate despite the best efforts of our leadership.”

Leadership within the department remains a subject of internal discourse, as some officers praised their higher-ups while others criticized the authority displayed.

“The leadership made people in patrol feel as though we were insignificant. Patrol was impacted the most by political backlash, but leadership never seemed to address our morale issues,” an officer who served less than 10 years wrote. “Also, when it comes to a decision for patrol, patrol officers were rarely afforded the options to voice our opinions of the department.”

Former Police Chiefs Carmen Best, Kathleen O’Toole, and Gil Kerlikowske received specific shout-outs for their leadership and comradery in the collected interviews.

Another officer used his exit interview to discuss the internal fighting within the department between specific higher-ups and the lack of respect shown by captains and other high-ranking staff.

“The negativity spread within and up the chain of command,” the officer wrote as his answer for what was causing negative morale.

Multiple officers reportedly felt they weren’t being heard or listened to, according to the exit interviews, including one stating “chain of command not sticking up for officers when they do the right thing” as the least enjoyable part of the job.

“I know our chief was busy, but I know that every correspondence that I sent to Chief Best was replied,” an officer transferring to another Washington police department wrote.

The lack of equipment, specifically vehicles, was repeatedly cited as another urgent matter for the department to solve.

“Our system is broken, and we are just chasing our tails and putting our lives at risk doing so,” an exit interview reply read.

On average, officers spend eight months training before they can patrol the streets alone, according to the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#). That means it is likely to take years to fill open jobs within U.S. police departments.

It’s important to remember, despite low-staffing trends and the over-politicization of the subject matter, these police officers left for their own personal reasons, including a five-year SPD veteran who wrote ‘family and I moving to the east coast’ as the reason for leaving their post.

Their least enjoyable part of working for the SPD? “The lack of reasonably affordable and safe parking.” Amid the grim circumstances facing the SPD, one 37-year police veteran shared their optimistic outlook ahead of their retirement.

“Times are tough. This department is family, regardless of what people say outside or within the department. It will overcome the obstacles.”

MyNorthwest has reached out to SPD for comment.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Inflation hits Seattle harder than most cities
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3782745/inflation-hitting-seattle-harder-most-cities-country/

GIST	<p>If the rising costs have felt disproportionate for the cities surrounding Puget Sound compared to the rest of the United States, that's because Seattle has the third-highest inflation in the nation, according to the most recent Consumer Price Index.</p> <p>"Well, according to Jake Vigdor, University of Washington professor of public policy and governance, the inflation we're experiencing in Seattle is not a local problem, but a global one," said Christine Clarridge, a Seattle-based reporter who broke the story for Axios. "Here in Seattle, we are particularly being impacted by our very high minimum wage, which I think is a little counterintuitive. So without enough people to fill jobs, employers keep having to raise their offering opening salary, and these are for entry-level jobs. And so when they're having to pay more than \$20 for jobs they used to be able to pay \$15 an hour. They have to raise the prices somewhere."</p> <p>Clarridge tells KIRO Newsradio she expects the restaurant industry to have the most severe rise in costs, with childcare and healthcare also expecting significant jumps in prices.</p> <p>"While some of our costs, like gas, are going down along with the rest of the country, we are offset by the places where we're not going to be released," Clarridge said.</p> <p>This domino effect is causing the price of goods — like eggs, for example — housing and cars to be steadily climbing throughout the region.</p> <p>"I don't know the answer to that. I don't think other people do either," Clarridge said regarding if the current prices are expected to go down anytime soon. "Although there is a lot of speculation, according to some of the experts I talk to, the higher interest rates are having an effect, and they predict that in the middle of 2023, we'll see leveling or some things going down. But again, Seattle may be the outlier."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Polarizing: free speech or out of order?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/01/17/public-comment-new-rules-free-speech/
GIST	<p>A school board meeting in Greeley, Colo., kicked off this month with a newly restrictive public comment policy — the fourth iteration in a year marked by such vitriol over masks and books that one member suggested suspending comment altogether. Two opportunities for citizens to address the board for a total of four minutes had already been slimmed to one three-minute chance. Now speakers would have two minutes.</p> <p>In Rochester, Minn., where public comment at city council meetings has featured personal attacks on the mayor and baseless accusations about the library promoting pedophilia, speakers since October have been permitted to comment just once a month — and the board is considering further restrictions.</p> <p>And in Salem, Ore., the school board in September closed meetings to the public and began taking comments by Zoom or phone or in writing, following what the superintendent called an "escalation of disruptive behavior" that had turned in-person comment into a "public forum for political agendas."</p> <p>Across a polarized nation, governing bodies are restricting — and sometimes even halting — public comment to counter what elected officials describe as an unprecedented level of invective, misinformation and disorder from citizens when they step to the microphone. As contentious social issues roil once-sleepy town council and school board gatherings, some officials say allowing people to have their say is poisoning meetings and thwarting the ability to get business done.</p> <p>"I'm not denigrating the concept of acknowledging true questions our community has. That's vital. That's what I've spent my entire adult life doing," said Rochester Mayor Kim Norton, a former school board member and Democratic state lawmaker. But, she added: "Do I think we have an obligation to have the same personal attacks be made week after week, year after year? No."</p> <p>The efforts to moderate public comment — and audience outbursts that can accompany it — are taking place in both red and blue regions as elected officials cope with what the American Association of School</p>

Administrators, the School Superintendents Association and the National School Boards Association [have referred to](#) as rising threats of violence and aggression at community meetings.

But some legal experts and lawmakers worry some restrictions are overreactions by thin-skinned officials that skirt unconstitutional limitations on free speech. Even if legal, they argue, reining in comment runs contrary to the American ideal of letting the public express views to representatives chosen and funded by taxpayers — even if those views include threats, bigotry and falsehoods.

“Access to public meetings and that face-to-face, whether virtual or in-person, opportunity for the citizenry to talk to their elected officials is foundational to our democracy,” said Carol Rose, executive director of the ACLU of Massachusetts. Her organization filed a [brief](#) in support of a challenge, which was recently heard by the state Supreme Court, to the public participation policy of the town of Southborough’s select board.

That [case](#) stemmed from a 2018 meeting at which a resident, citing a state finding that the board had violated open meeting law, accused members of “breaking the law” and then, when its chair ended public comment, called him “a Hitler.” The resident argues the policy, which prohibits “rude, personal or slanderous remarks,” was unconstitutionally deployed to avoid criticism. The town says it is reasonable to maintain order.

Elected councils and boards generally are not required to hold in-person public comment sessions, but most see it as best practice. Rules vary: Many set time limits, prohibit applause or signs, and restrict comments to agenda items.

Others let speakers opine on whatever they wish. Members often do not respond substantively to avoid lengthy debates. A growing number, the ACLU says, instruct speakers to be civil and refrain from personal attacks.

Francisco Negron, the chief legal officer for the National School Boards Association, said he advises members that time and topic limits are generally fine, as is limiting speaking opportunities to locals at a time when curriculum debates often draw national activists. Smaller citizen advisory groups can also help give constituents other forums to air concerns, he said.

But generally, Negron said, he tells boards: Parents care deeply about children, so let them have their say.

“If a person is impassioned, a person is loud, a person is visibly shaken, those things are all okay in the public sphere, as long as there’s no actual physical safety threat,” he said. When it comes to false comments: “It’s democracy. Everybody in this country has the right to their opinion.”

But the policies are being tested at a time of increased — and impassioned — interest in local politics.

In Indiana, a school board [suspended public comment](#) in 2021 after raucous meetings, including one at which an audience member’s gun fell from his pocket. Last year, state lawmakers overwhelmingly passed [a bill](#) forbidding that option. School boards must now offer time for oral public comment at all meetings, though they are permitted to take “reasonable steps to maintain order.”

“Parents deserve to have their voices heard when it comes to their children’s education,” state Rep. Tim O’Brien (R), the bill’s sponsor, said in an email. “It’s terrible public policy to make decisions in a vacuum.”

Federal courts have offered mixed guidance, legal experts say. The Supreme Court has affirmed Americans’ right to criticize public officials. But those officials may impose neutral limits in settings such as town council meetings — limiting speakers’ time and the topics to be addressed, for example. Courts have been less consistent about whether rules policing vaguer notions, such as decorum, are acceptable.

“What does rude mean? What does courteous mean?” said attorney Ruth Bourquin of the ACLU of Massachusetts, which was joined by a free-market group, Pioneer Legal, in its opposition to the Southborough policy.

It has left board and council chairs and their attorneys to navigate gray legal terrain while trying to get through agenda items.

In Greeley, Colo., things grew especially heated in September, when a woman read a passage from a book that she complained was in school libraries: Toni Morrison’s “The Bluest Eye,” one of nation’s [most challenged books](#), according to the American Library Association. It graphically describes a father’s rape of his young daughter.

Superintendent Deirdre Pilch faulted the woman for “trying to horrify” the audience, which included students. A board member tearfully suggested suspending public comment.

The board did not seriously consider that, said its president, Michael Mathews. But Mathews, a Presbyterian minister, said members did consult with attorneys about where constitutional protections end.

“It’s been difficult to know what to rule ‘out of order,’” he said. “We could suspend public comment. But it’s not something we ever want to do. We want to hear from our public.”

In December, speakers were allowed a single spot of three minutes each. Things went off the rails almost immediately.

The first speaker called the board “tyrants and criminals ... pushing pornography on children.” Mathews sunnily thanked him for his comments. The second presented a stack of papers she said were district complaint forms about books that “violate federal obscenity laws.” Several other attendees filed to the front of the room, where they dropped thousands more forms on the floor as a security guard hovered.

When the superintendent called for a recess to clear what she referred to as “trash,” half the room erupted. “You’re trash!” a man yelled. Mathews pounded his gavel, calling a recess.

The board returned minutes later, and comments resumed.

“You want us to go away?” asked one speaker, Candice Sawyer. “Then take what we’re doing and understand that we’re upset, and we’re growing in numbers.”

A man called the new policy “anti-constitutional” and said he would ignore it. A woman screamed that board members were “disgusting.”

Mathews called a second recess, then adjourned the meeting early after audience members again shouted while the superintendent reported on her efforts to address complaints about books.

When the board returned this month, speakers had two minutes each, an additional uniformed officer was present, and audience chairs were rearranged so that anyone approaching the dais would need to pass a security officer.

“It is perfectly legal for someone to come and call me disgusting,” Mathews said. “The problem is the behavior — and by people who are not speaking.” Zoom-only meetings remain an option if disruptions continue, he added. “We can’t just keep postponing reports that we’re receiving or business that we need to attend to.”

In Rochester, City Council President Brooke Carlson said one of her primary concerns is making sure meetings remain welcoming to people of all viewpoints and identities. The council’s once-monthly limit on commenting has helped, she said, though it did not please regular speakers.

“You are supposed to be servants of the people,” one, Othelmo da Silva, told the board, according to a video of the meeting. “You should be here to listen to us for as long as you need to, because we are technically your bosses.”

That is a view shared by Barry Sanders, a city council member in Taunton, Mass. Last fall, the council briefly suspended public input after a speaker chastised a council member by name over a dispute that began on social media, violating a requirement that comments be “respectful, courteous and not personal in nature.” Sanders opposed the suspension.

“That’s what the First Amendment speaks to: the right of the public to have their grievances heard. Not the right of the public to say nice things about their elected officials,” Sanders said.

A local progressive group, Taunton Diversity Network, was also concerned. The council has now settled on a policy that limits speaking time and prohibits threats or incitement, but also eliminates the civility requirements.

In Oregon, the Aug. 9 Salem-Keizer school board’s comment session began with the usual guidance from its chair: Speakers chosen at random would have three minutes each. Disruptions such as fighting, vulgarity or hate speech might get you ejected.

Meetings had been tense for months, and this one was no different. When one woman referred to the memoir “Gender Queer” as “cartoon pornography,” shouts erupted from the audience, prompting the board’s attorney to deem the comment “First Amendment-protected speech.” Crowd members protested: “That was hate speech!” a man yelled.

Friction rose as speakers offered dueling comments on a proposed ban on weapons on school properties. Other speakers condemned the “school-to-prison pipeline” and accused some audience and board members of being “white supremacists.”

Animus between speakers spilled into the parking lot and came close to physical confrontation, according to a later investigation by the district’s safety manager, who recommended in-person meetings and comment be halted for safety purposes. Perry, the superintendent, said she agreed — but not happily.

“It used to be, ‘Come in, sign up. We’ll call on you.’ No big deal, right?” Perry said. That changed during the pandemic, she said.

“You want that personal connection, so I think that is what’s missing when the public is not in the room,” said Perry, who is retiring this year. “I think I’ve been known for that over my career and saying, ‘How can we bring this together and find that common ground?’ And I haven’t really figured that out yet. ... We are living in really polarized times.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Bellevue safe parking to those living in cars
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/bellevue-free-parking-program-people-living-in-their-cars/281-3e69cd20-0ddc-4239-bee7-d61642aac058
GIST	<p>BELLEVUE, Wash. — The City of Bellevue has allocated \$450,000 for its Safe Parking Pilot Program in the 2023-2024.</p> <p>The program is aimed at providing a safe place to park for people living out of their vehicles. Nico Quijano, the city's Homelessness Outreach Coordinator, says there's not a certain demographic that would benefit more than others from this program.</p> <p>"I've worked with folks with really young children who are sleeping in their cars. I've worked with senior citizens on a fixed income who can't find a place they can afford," Quijano said.</p>

	<p>Quijano says the program is designed to help people get back on track.</p> <p>"We want to be able to offer people somewhere they can have privacy. Where they can park and focus on getting going in the right direction and receive some of the basic services they need to survive," he said. "That includes things like having a place to charge their phones, a mailing address, access to email."</p> <p>The proposed location is in a somewhat secluded area. It's a parking lot at the Lincoln Center near 116th North East Avenue and 4th Street. Currently, Congregations for the Homeless is there, but the city has plans to move the homeless shelter to East Gate. The Safe Parking Pilot Program would then take over the vacant space.</p> <p>According to the latest count from the city, 83 people were living out of the cars in December 2021.</p> <p>Quijano believes that number is higher because it's hard to get an accurate of people who are experiencing homelessness, forced to live in their cars.</p> <p>"I think referring to those folks as unseen is a fair way to characterize the homelessness we see in the city of Bellevue," Quijano said. "We want to make sure they have that extra step, that they are seen, taken care of and given the support they need."</p> <p>The city is still working through a lot of logistics, but they're hoping to select a program operator to launch the Safe Parking Pilot Program in Q2 of this year.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Thousands of WA seniors losing insurance
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/healthcare/seniors-losing-insurance/281-504220d8-64e2-4ccb-9e0f-45e4d3529362
GIST	<p>ARLINGTON, Wash — At 74 years old, Jo Ford keeps herself in good shape by line dancing every week at the Stilly Senior Center in Arlington, but she worries what shape her health insurance is in right now.</p> <p>"I felt like the rug had been pulled out from under us," she said.</p> <p>Ford has been a client at The Everett Clinic for nearly 50 years.</p> <p>Last month, she received a letter from her insurer, Regence BlueShield, stating the clinic decided to leave the Regence provider network because of a dispute over rising costs and payments.</p> <p>A Regence spokesperson told KING 5 that the company is, "working with (its) Medicare Advantage members to ensure they receive the care they need."</p> <p>Yet, the company confirmed some Regence Medicare Advantage customers have been getting turned away from clinics because their insurance is no longer accepted.</p> <p>"We thought we had good coverage," Ford said. "We never thought it would come to this."</p> <p>Ford has been going to the Everett Clinic for nearly 50 years.</p> <p>At 74, she's now having to search for new insurance, and likely new doctors, while delaying care for her husband and herself until June or July.</p> <p>"It's upsetting to have to make these changes," she said. "It's one thing if you make the change. It's another when a big company makes the change for you and leaves you high and dry."</p> <p>Optum Health Care owns both the Everett Clinic and Polyclinic in Seattle.</p>

	<p>A clinic spokesperson said 4,000 clients are impacted by the dispute, adding, "Our priority and focus continue to be providing compassionate, affordable, quality care for our patients and communities."</p> <p>The Everett Clinic emailed a list of Medicare Advantage providers who are partnering with Optum Health Care for 2023. They are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humana Medicare Advantage HMO, PPO & D-SNP, • Kaiser Permanente Medicare Advantage HMO • Premiera Blue Cross Medicare Advantage HMO • UnitedHealthcare Medicare Advantage HMO, PPO, D-SNP, & I-SNP <p>For now, Ford is focusing on staying healthy and trying to stay in step with the complicated dance of the healthcare industry.</p> <p>"It is scary. It keeps you awake at night," she said. "At this stage in our lives, why should we be shopping around for another provider when we have other things to worry about?"</p> <p>Optum and Regence continue contract negotiations, but at this point there is no agreement in sight.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Lynnwood seeks to block opioid clinic site
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/lynnwood-to-debate-request-to-state-health-dept-to-stop-opioid-clinic-drugs-addict-safety-children-methadone-council-health-department-boys-and-girls-club-facility-city-councilmember-seattle-washington-king-county#
GIST	<p>LYNNWOOD, Wash. — City leaders in Lynnwood are down to some of their last options to block an opioid clinic from opening just weeks from now. On Tuesday night, councilmembers approved a group letter to send the state Department of Health asking for clinic's operating license to be delayed.</p> <p>The move follows weeks of uproar and community protests over how close the treatment facility places recovering drug addicts next to children.</p> <p>Councilmembers hope the letter to the health department buys them some time, although Mayor Christine Frizzell has other measures in the works.</p> <p>"I have a meeting set up with the department of health in the next week, and I also have a meeting set up with Acadia," the mayor said after Tuesday night's meeting.</p> <p>A company called Acadia Healthcare wants to open the facility at the end of the month to provide methadone for hundreds of patients every day. However, the proposed facility is just a short distance away from the Alderwood Boys and Girls Club and down the street from athletic fields where young kids play baseball.</p> <p>Acadia Healthcare has met all the requirements to run the clinic and has committed to taking security measures so problems are minimized in the neighborhood. Still, council members want time to consider other potential sites where this facility could operate.</p> <p>"I'm not talking about the 'not in my backyard' syndrome but rather where is the best place to have something like this," said Lynnwood City Councilmember Jim Smith.</p> <p>The mayor said employees at Acadia Healthcare have misrepresented the community outreach they've done so far. She gave one example of the notification one Acadia representative claimed to give to Lynnwood police.</p> <p>"She said, 'Oh yes, Officer Carter and I had a great conversation. He was very engaging. He said this, I said this,'" but then the mayor interrupted to say, "Well I question that because Officer Carter is a woman."</p>

	<p>The opioid treatment facility is currently slated to open on Jan. 30. Supporters have said its services are desperately needed in the area, especially given the skyrocketing number of fatal drug overdoses.</p> <p>Councilmember Smith sent a separate letter to Gov. Jay Inslee asking him to intervene. KOMO News checked to see if the governor plans to get involved and received this statement from his office:</p> <p><i>“Such clinics are licensed by the state, not sited. So long as statutory requirements are met, a license can be issued. The city’s planning department had already approved the site, located on a property zoned as a medical business. We would refer you to the state Department of Health for more information about the licensing process.”</i></p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 US arms stored in Israel sent to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/us/politics/ukraine-israel-weapons.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is tapping into a vast but little-known stockpile of American ammunition in Israel to help meet Ukraine’s dire need for artillery shells in the war with Russia, American and Israeli officials say.</p> <p>The stockpile provides arms and ammunition for the Pentagon to use in Middle East conflicts. The United States has also allowed Israel to access the supplies in emergencies.</p> <p>The Ukraine conflict has become an artillery-driven war of attrition, with each side lobbing thousands of shells every day. Ukraine has run low on munitions for its Soviet-era weaponry and has largely shifted to firing artillery and rounds donated by the United States and other Western allies.</p> <p>Artillery constitutes the backbone of ground combat firepower for both Ukraine and Russia, and the war’s outcome may hinge on which side runs out of ammunition first, military analysts say. With stockpiles in the United States strained and American arms makers not yet able to keep up with the pace of Ukraine’s battlefield operations, the Pentagon has turned to two alternative supplies of shells to bridge the gap: one in South Korea and the one in Israel, whose use in the Ukraine war has not been previously reported.</p> <p>The shipment of hundreds of thousands of artillery shells from the two stockpiles to help sustain Ukraine’s war effort is a story about the limits of America’s industrial base and the diplomatic sensitivities of two vital U.S. allies that have publicly committed not to send lethal military aid to Ukraine.</p> <p>Israel has consistently refused to supply weapons to Ukraine out of fear of damaging relations with Moscow and initially expressed concerns about appearing complicit in arming Ukraine if the Pentagon drew its munitions from the stockpile. About half of the 300,000 rounds destined for Ukraine have already been shipped to Europe and will eventually be delivered through Poland, Israeli and American officials said.</p> <p>As senior defense and military officials from dozens of nations, including NATO states, prepare to meet at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Friday to discuss sending Ukraine more tanks and other arms, U.S. officials have been scrambling behind the scenes to cobble together enough shells to keep Kyiv sufficiently supplied this year, including through an anticipated spring offensive.</p> <p>“With the front line now mostly stationary, artillery has become the most important combat arm,” Mark F. Cancian, a former White House weapons strategist, said in a new study for the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, where he is a senior adviser.</p> <p>Another analysis published last month by the Foreign Policy Research Institute said that if Ukraine continued to receive a steady supply of ammunition, particularly for artillery, as well as spare parts, it would stand a good chance of wresting back more territory that Russia had seized.</p>

“The question is whether these advantages will prove sufficient for Ukrainian forces to retake territory from entrenched Russian troops,” wrote Rob Lee and Michael Kofman, leading military analysts.

Arming the Ukrainian military with enough artillery ammunition is part of a larger American-led effort to increase its overall combat power by also providing more precision long-range weapons, Western tanks and [armored fighting vehicles](#), and combined arms training.

The United States has so far sent or pledged to send Ukraine just over one million 155-millimeter shells. A sizable portion of that — though less than half — has come from the stockpiles in Israel and South Korea, a senior U.S. official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss operational matters.

Other Western countries, including Germany, Canada, Estonia and Italy, have sent 155-millimeter shells to Ukraine.

The Ukrainian army uses [about 90,000 artillery rounds a month](#), about twice the rate they are being manufactured by the United States and European countries combined, U.S. and Western officials say. The rest must come from other sources, including existing stockpiles or commercial sales.

Mr. Kofman said in an interview that without adjustments to how the Ukrainian military fights, future Ukrainian offensives might require significantly more artillery ammunition to make progress against entrenched Russian defenses.

“The U.S. is making up the difference from its stockpiles, but that’s doubtfully a sustainable solution,” said Mr. Kofman, who is the director of Russian studies at CNA, a research institute in Arlington, Va. “It means the U.S. is taking on risk elsewhere.”

Pentagon officials say they must ensure that even as they arm Ukraine, American stockpiles do not dip to dangerously low levels. According to two senior Israeli officials, the United States has promised Israel that it will replenish what it takes from the warehouses in its territory and would immediately ship ammunition in a severe emergency.

“We are confident that we will continue to be able to support Ukraine for as long as it takes,” Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder, the Pentagon spokesman, [told reporters last week](#). “And we’re confident that we’ll be able to continue to maintain the readiness levels that are vital to defending our nation.”

General Ryder told The New York Times in a statement on Tuesday that the Pentagon “will not discuss the location or units providing the equipment or materiel,” citing operational security reasons.

And those war reserve stockpiles are playing a pivotal role.

When last year the Pentagon first raised the idea of withdrawing munitions from the stockpile, Israeli officials expressed concern about Moscow’s reaction.

Israel has imposed [a near-total embargo on selling weapons to Ukraine](#), fearing that Russia might retaliate by using its forces in Syria to limit Israeli airstrikes aimed at Iranian and Hezbollah forces there.

Israel’s relationship with Russia [has come under close scrutiny](#) since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last February, and Ukrainian officials have called out Israel’s government for offering their country only limited support and bowing to Russian pressure.

As the war dragged on, the Pentagon and the Israelis reached an agreement to move about 300,000 155-millimeter shells, Israeli and American officials said.

The American desire to move the munitions was officially submitted in an encrypted phone conversation between the U.S. secretary of defense, Lloyd J. Austin III, and Benny Gantz, the Israeli minister of defense at the time, according to an Israeli official who was briefed on the details of the conversation.

Mr. Gantz brought the issue to the Israeli cabinet. The officials asked to hear the opinion of the defense establishment, whose representatives recommended accepting the plan to avoid tension with the United States, in part because the ammunition was American property. Yair Lapid, then the prime minister, approved the request at the end of the discussion.

The Israeli officials said that Israel had not changed its policy of not providing Ukraine with lethal weapons and rather was acceding to an American decision to use its own ammunition as it saw fit.

“Based on a U.S. request, certain equipment was transferred to the U.S. D.O.D. from its stockpiles” in Israel, a spokesman for the Israeli Defense Forces said in a statement, referring to the Department of Defense.

The stockpile of American military hardware and munitions in Israel has its origins in the [1973 Arab-Israeli War](#), which saw the United States airlifting weapons to resupply Israeli forces.

After the war, the United States established warehouses in Israel so that it could rely on them if it were again caught in a crisis. A strategic memorandum signed by the two countries in the 1980s paved the way for the “pre-positioning” of Pentagon assets in Israel, according to two former U.S. officials and a former senior Israeli military officer with direct knowledge of the agreement.

American tanks and armored personnel carriers were initially moved to Israel’s southern desert with the understanding that they would be used by U.S. forces in the region if needed, said the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive internal deliberations.

In the 2000s, the program was expanded to include munitions for the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force — all stored in separate locations accessible only to American military personnel, according to a former U.S. arms inspector.

At the time, the stockpile, officially called the WRSA-I, or [War Reserve Stocks for Allies-Israel](#), was overseen by the U.S. European Command. But it is now managed by the U.S. Central Command, following [a redrawing of its area of responsibility](#) in September 2021.

Israel was allowed to withdraw American munitions from the stockpile during its war with Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 and again during operations against Hamas in the Gaza Strip in 2014, according to [a Congressional Research Service report](#) released in February 2022.

The Pentagon also approached South Korea last year about transferring munitions in the U.S. stockpile there to Ukraine.

The South Koreans were more willing than the Israelis to work with the United States on using the stocks, a senior U.S. official said. But they also objected to shipping artillery shells directly to Ukraine, though for different reasons, the official said. The South Korean government did not want artillery rounds marked R.O.K. (Republic of Korea) showing up in Ukraine in violation of South Korean arms export rules.

A compromise was reached. Artillery shells from the Korean stockpile would be sent to replenish American stocks elsewhere.

The United States has also agreed to buy 100,000 new artillery shells from South Korea, a deal [previously reported by The Wall Street Journal](#).

U.S. officials say that accessing the overseas stocks will help tide over the Ukrainians until American ammunition makers can ramp up their production.

Other factors may ease the pressure for more shells. Russia’s artillery fire has reduced sharply in recent weeks, Pentagon officials said, possibly reflecting rationing of rounds because of low supplies. White

	<p>House officials said in November that North Korea was shipping artillery shells to Russia, another sign of likely munitions shortages, U.S. officials said.</p> <p>Finally, the United States is helping Ukraine use ammunition more efficiently. The Ukrainians have been firing so many artillery barrages that about a third of the 155-millimeter howitzers provided by the United States and other Western nations are out of commission for repairs.</p> <p>Over the summer, during intense fighting between Ukraine and Russia in the eastern region of Donbas, Pentagon officials gathered satellite imagery that showed the devastation wrought on farmland between the two forces' trench lines. Fields had been transformed into moonscapes, pitted and pocked with thousands of crater shells.</p> <p>Since then, American officials have leaned on Ukrainians to use their artillery more judiciously. And the arrival of precision rocket artillery, like HIMARS rocket artillery, has allowed Ukraine to strike more expertly.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Debt limit threat looms: US run out of cash?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/business/economy/debt-limit-wall-street-plan.html
GIST	<p>With days to go before the United States bumps up against a technical limit on how much debt it can issue, Wall Street analysts and political prognosticators are warning that a perennial source of partisan brinkmanship could finally tip into outright catastrophe in 2023.</p> <p>Big investors and bank economists are using financial models to predict when the United States, which borrows money to pay its existing bills, will run out of cash. They are assessing what it could mean if the government is unable to pay some of its bondholders and the country defaults on its debt. And they are gaming out how to both minimize risks and make the most of any opportunities to profit that might be hiding in the chaos.</p> <p>The need to start planning for a potential debt limit breach became more urgent last week, when Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen told Congress that the United States would hit its borrowing cap on Thursday. At that point, Treasury will begin using “extraordinary measures” to try to stay under the cap for as long as possible — but those options could be exhausted as soon as June.</p> <p>Congress places a limit on the amount of debt the country can issue, with a simple majority in the House and Senate required to lift it. That cap, currently \$31.4 trillion, needs to be adjusted to allow the United States to borrow to pay for obligations it has already committed to, such as funding for social safety net programs, interest on the national debt and salaries for troops.</p> <p>Wrangling over lifting the borrowing cap has become a fixture, and this year is shaping up to be particularly complicated. Republicans hold the House by a slim majority, and a small but vocal faction of the party has won changes to the rules that govern legislative debate. They have made clear that they want deep spending cuts in exchange for raising the debt limit, and their empowerment could make this round of negotiations more likely to end in disaster.</p> <p>Bank of America analysts wrote in a note to clients this week that a default in late summer or early fall is “likely,” while Goldman Sachs called the possibility that the government would not be able to make good on its bills a “greater risk” than at any time since 2011. When the nation approached the brink in that episode, its credit rating was downgraded and wild market gyrations helped to force lawmakers to blink.</p> <p>In Washington, the Federal Reserve and Treasury are not publicly speaking about what they could do if an outright default were to happen this time, in part because the mere suggestion they will bail out warring politicians could leave lawmakers with less of an incentive to reach a deal. But they have a series of options — albeit bad ones — for mitigating the disaster if political impasse takes the nation up to or over the brink of default.</p>

It is tricky to guess exactly how financial markets will react, both because the timing of any default is uncertain and because many investors are waiting and watching to see what happens in Washington.

But former government officials and cautious Wall Street observers warn that the effects could be significant. Markets have grown bigger and more complex since 2011, and an outright default could lead to mass selling, which would impair financial functioning. While the government has done contingency planning for a default, former officials say there is no foolproof option for staving off a disaster.

“There is no good plan,” said Jack Lew, a former Treasury secretary during the Obama administration. “It’s a more dangerous time than ever before to test it.”

Despite the risks, some financial pain may prove necessary to force lawmakers to reach a solution, said Daleep Singh, a former official at the Treasury, the Fed and the White House who is now the chief global economist at PGIM Fixed Income.

“Treasury and the Fed have options, but none of them would pass the sniff test of credibility with markets,” he said. “Markets have to do the heavy lifting of creating the drama that the politicians need to compromise.”

But investors may remain complacent for too long, said Mark Zandi, the chief economist at Moody’s Analytics, the research arm of the rating agency.

“There may be less reaction until it’s too late,” he said.

Strategists across Wall Street have sent out a raft of research assessing when the United States will exhaust its ability to stay under the debt limit — what is known as the X-date — and how a default might ripple through asset classes.

T.D. Securities analysts think that the credit rating on U.S. debt is likely to be lowered if negotiations go badly, which could spook some investors. S&P Global Ratings downgraded U.S. debt in 2011, but other major rating agencies still award the sovereign their top assessment. They also expect that people will sell out of risky assets like stocks if a default occurs, while actually piling into some Treasury bonds.

In the month before the debt ceiling was raised in summer 2011, short-dated government bonds called bills swiftly fell in value, pushing their yield — indicative of the government’s cost of borrowing for three months — sharply higher. Stock prices fell, and the 10-year Treasury yield moved in the opposite direction, in part because it was still seen by investors as a safe place to park their cash.

But there was no actual default in 2011. The only time the United States failed to pay a bill was in 1979 — but that was after an agreement had been struck and because of a technical issue.

Some investors have begun to look into protection in case the United States does renege on its debts. One trader at BNP Paribas recently sent some investors prices for U.S. credit default swaps, which provide some insurance in return for a small premium, paying out any money they lose if the government does not pay them on time. Such a price list is rare, with interest in protection on American debt usually low given the unlikelihood of default. The price of these contracts has steadily risen over the past six months, implying a higher, though still small, likelihood of a debt ceiling breach.

Priya Misra, the head of global rates strategy at T.D., said that while analysts and investors were thinking about the possibility of debt ceiling disaster, she had seen little to no trading in debt markets in anticipation. The uncertainties are still vast, and many investors think that a compromise will eventually be struck, a complacency Ms. Misra sees as misplaced.

“The political situation is similar,” she said, “but financial markets are a lot less liquid.”

There is recent precedent for a meltdown. Trading in the Treasury market broke down in 2020, at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, as investors rapidly sold some types of government debt and set off a chain reaction of asset dumping, bedlam that stopped only as a result of Fed intervention.

If markets experience a new disaster caused by the debt limit debate, the Fed could again blunt the damage. Central bank officials planned for a possible default in 2011 and 2013, and transcripts from those meetings lay out a rough, unattractive playbook.

If the government failed to make regular payments on some bonds, those securities could plummet in value and become difficult to trade. The Fed has a few ways of siphoning defaulted Treasury bonds out of financial markets, which could help to prevent them from causing broader problems. For one, it could accept the bonds in operations that take government debt as collateral, based on the 2011 transcripts.

And the Fed's staff suggested in 2013 that the central bank could purchase defaulted Treasury bonds outright — or swap them for healthier ones — in a bid to keep markets functioning.

But such intervention would plunge the carefully apolitical central bank into the center of the partisan fray. If the Fed succeeded at mitigating the financial fallout, it might make it easier for the debt ceiling fight to continue. Plus, the Fed would be imperiling its independence to pursue its own policy goals — most notably stable prices — if it abruptly reversed its current policy of reducing its bond holdings in order to save the broader government.

“Such actions would insert the Federal Reserve into a very strained political situation and could raise questions about its independence from Treasury debt management issues,” William B. English, a Fed staff member, said during the 2013 call.

Jerome H. Powell, who is now the Fed's chair, called the possibility of purposely buying defaulted Treasury debt “loathsome” during that meeting.

The Treasury also has tools to stem the bleeding. It could prioritize payments, something that was considered in past debt limit debates and which lawmakers might push for. By paying back bond holders first, it could theoretically forestall financial market disaster.

But prioritization could prove tricky both logistically and politically. The systems used to send out payments are not finely calibrated enough for the government to quickly and surgically adjust who receives checks, Mr. Lew said. If Treasury could pull it off, he added, the trade-offs could be crushing, forcing government personnel to decide between paying financial markets, disability rosters or health care systems.

“It's a world of contrasts that's indefensible,” Mr. Lew said.

The Treasury is often encouraged to consider other alternatives, like minting a \$1 trillion coin and depositing it at the Fed, exploiting a legal loophole to raise money to keep paying the bills.

“It's been taken seriously,” Mr. Singh, the former Treasury official at PGIM, said of the coin-minting idea. But such maneuvers would reduce the government to “silly gimmicks and cheap legal tricks, and that's only slightly better than default.”

Even with short-term bandages, investors might lose faith in the government, leading to higher financing costs for the nation.

“You can't put Humpty Dumpty back together again if you default on the debt,” said William C. Dudley, the former president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/world/europe/wagner-group-defection-norway-russia-war.html
GIST	<p>A former member of a notorious Russian paramilitary force has surrendered to Norwegian authorities, a rare defection that his lawyer and Russian human rights activists say could aid international investigations into Moscow's atrocities in Ukraine.</p> <p>Andrei Medvedev, who says he commanded about 15 fighters in the Wagner mercenary group in Ukraine, has applied for asylum in Norway after being detained by local security forces for illegally crossing the nation's border with Russia in the early hours of Friday, his lawyer, Brynjulf Risnes, said.</p> <p>Norwegian immigration authorities confirmed that a man matching Mr. Medvedev's description was detained and had requested asylum, but declined to comment further, citing security and privacy concerns.</p> <p>In a video published on Monday, Mr. Medvedev told a Russian human rights activist, Vladimir Osechkin, that he had crossed into Norway on foot and requested asylum after surrendering to the police. He said he was willing to collaborate with international investigators into potential war crimes committed by Wagner, a major paramilitary force at the center of the Kremlin's war efforts in Ukraine.</p> <p>Mr. Risnes, the lawyer, said Mr. Medvedev's case is the first of its kind in Norway, adding that it could set a precedent for how the West handles the defection of Russian fighters.</p> <p>In a series of interviews with The New York Times before leaving Russia, Mr. Medvedev, 26, said he had joined Wagner in July and led a detachment made up primarily of enlisted prisoners in the battles around the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut. The name of Mr. Medvedev's unit was corroborated by one of his alleged subordinates, a recruited prisoner named Yevgeny Nuzhin, who was debriefed by Ukrainian forces after surrendering to them in September.</p> <p>Mr. Nuzhin was returned to Wagner in a prison exchange soon after and executed for treason.</p> <p>Mr. Medvedev said he deserted in November, before Mr. Nuzhin's execution, and returned to Russia. There, he contacted Mr. Osechkin and other human rights activists for help. He moved between cities until his escape to Norway.</p> <p>At one point, in November, he approached Wagner's headquarters in St. Petersburg and handed his military dog tag to a security guard, a scene captured on video by his companion and uploaded on YouTube.</p> <p>Mr. Medvedev's own accounts of his life and military service have been contradictory at times, and he has declined to provide evidence for his most explosive claims.</p> <p>Mr. Medvedev, who grew up in a Siberian orphanage and had served at least four years in jail for robbery, said he had witnessed summary executions on the front lines of Wagner fighters accused of cowardice and desertion, as well as dramatic casualty rates suffered by inmate units sent by commanders on suicide missions. The claims have not been independently verified.</p> <p>Two acquaintances of Mr. Medvedev, who have met him since July, have confirmed that he had enlisted in Wagner, but were unable to confirm the details of his service. Their identities are being withheld to protect them against Wagner's potential retaliation.</p> <p>Mr. Medvedev's contract with Wagner last year was the third time he had carried out military activities in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine, according to people in Ukraine and Russia who met him at the time. He was previously in Donbas in 2015 and 2020, although his exact role and affiliation at the time is unclear.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 New military relationships Indo-Pacific area
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/17/china-threat-sparks-web-new-relationships-us-milit/

SEOUL — The U.S. and its allies in the long shadow of rising China are forging a complex web of defense relationships, bilateral and multilateral, linking democracies across the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

This week, Indian and Japanese warplanes kicked off 11 days of joint drills over Japan featuring Japan's U.S.-made F15s and India's Russian-built SU30s. In another first, Australian and British paratroopers this month jumped alongside American and Japanese counterparts in the first exercise to unite airborne troops of all four nations in the skies above Japan.

On Jan. 11, Tokyo and London signed a "reciprocal access agreement" enabling an exchange of forces and equipment. It was based on an agreement that Australia and Japan signed a year ago.

The new partnerships paper over a yawning gap. Since the post-Vietnam War collapse of the anti-communist Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in 1977, no "Asian NATO" has risen to share regional defense burdens or coordinate policy toward the threats posed by a rising China or a hostile North Korea.

"For the U.S., it was easier to create unity of vision on the European continent after World War II and during the Cold War," said Alex Neill, a Singapore-based security consultant. "There was no Marshall Plan for recovery in the Indo-Pacific, so there was an ad hoc bilateral approach."

The U.S. is committed under various treaties to separately defend allies such as Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea and Japan. For historical and military reasons, the commitment to Taiwan is fuzzier, though President Biden has repeatedly insisted that the U.S. military will react if China takes action against Taipei.

Now, after a long vacuum, more multilateral groupings are emerging. Analysts say the endpoint is hard to ascertain.

Democracies that make up the "Quad" – Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. – are increasingly drilling together, and South Korea and Japan are showing signs of an easing of tensions that have long bedeviled U.S. strategic planning in the region. In 2021, the AUKUS partnership of Canberra, London and Washington, designed to offer Australia nuclear submarines, added another security framework to the region.

Internal changes

Some of the major players in the patchwork of new connections are finding internal changes as well.

Nominally and constitutionally pacifist Japan is spreading its military wings wider than at any other time since 1945. In the past two years, Japanese troops have drilled with partner nations in the Philippines, the Bay of Bengal and the South Pacific. The government of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has committed Japan to beefing up its offensive assets: marine landing forces, light carriers and cruise missiles that can strike an adversary from a long range.

"Japan is playing catch-up," said Lance Gatling, a former operational planning officer with the U.S. military command in Japan. "It is chasing countries it wants to have bilateral relations with."

Even Atlanticist Europe, shaken by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and wary of China, is looking east.

Japan and South Korea were invited to the NATO summit in Madrid last year, and German air assets, led by the commander of the German air force himself, conducted drills in Australia and Japan.

In 2021, the United Kingdom deployed its new F-35 aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, beefed up with U.S. and Dutch assets, on a 28-week maiden voyage to the Indo-Pacific. France, which maintains territories in the South Pacific, has sent its Charles de Gaulle carrier strike group on regional tours and is currently drilling in the Indian Ocean. French Rafale jets from the vessel landed in Singapore on Tuesday.

Tricky dynamics

It is all a response to two dynamics: a U.S. government demanding more from its allies and a reaction to what many in the region see as Beijing's heavy-handedness as its economic and military prowess expand.

"The major trigger was the Trump presidency, which was a huge shock to the whole network of 'hub and spoke' alliances," said Richard Javad Heydarian, an international relations professor at the University of the Philippines. "And that went hand in hand with the rise of China."

The shifting, tricky dynamics have raised troubling questions for regional defense chiefs.

"Will the U.S. be here forever?" Mr. Gatling wondered. "I think so, but it's a legitimate question."

The U.S. has welcomed cooperative initiatives by like-minded partners for regional flashpoints.

They include a Chinese invasion or blockade of Taiwan, a North Korean strike against South Korea with the threat of a nuclear escalation, a clash around China's expanding network of maritime bases in the South China Sea, an escalation of Chinese-Japanese territorial tensions in the East China Sea, and a fresh outbreak of military clashes on the unsettled China-India border in the high Himalayas.

Weak punch, minimal commitment

Although the risks are real and in many cases growing more acute, many say the regional alignments lack backbone and staying power.

A retired Indian admiral said the Quad is a "talking shop" lacking mutual defense commitments. He noted that the alliance has no headquarters building or assigned units and no secretary-general to lead members through crises. Multiple Southeast Asian militaries — including those of Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines — are far more focused on domestic security threats than the strategic architecture of the region.

Some of the changes will be a long time coming, though a threat from China or North Korea could materialize sooner.

AUKUS is unlikely to deliver nuclear submarines to Australia before 2036. Japan's role in a potential U.S.-Chinese clash over Taiwan remains hazy, and South Korean officials hesitate to even discuss the possibility of a crisis in public.

In addition, the biggest multinational grouping in the region lacks operational flexibility.

Based in South Korea, the U.S.-led United Nations Command (UNC) comprises 16 "sending states" that defended South Korea in the 1950-1953 Korean War. At a Seoul forum last year, U.S. Forces Korea and Gen. Paul LaCamera, UNC commander, acknowledged that the powerful force has no defined mandate for a role in a conflict beyond the divided peninsula.

Except for the U.S., which has a bilateral treaty with Seoul, UNC member states are not even obligated to defend South Korea if war flares up again.

British Ambassador to South Korea Colin Crooks made that clear at a press conference last week. Though British troops conducted winter drills with South Korean troops in November, Mr. Crooks declined to comment on whether British forces would defend South Korea.

Despite London's deep commercial and diplomatic links in the region, the military component of its "Tilt to Indo-Pacific" is feeble compared with the U.S. pivot.

Washington maintains a carrier strike group, amphibious assault ships, nuclear submarines, a Marine division and Special Forces units in the region. London's regional naval assets consist of two offshore patrol vessels.

Force multipliers

So what do U.S. allies bring to the Indo-Pacific table?

"Smaller powers cannot guarantee deterrence but can help as force multipliers. They can offer geography or niche capabilities," said Mr. Neill, the Singapore security consultant. He said British or Japanese F-35Bs can operate on U.S. carriers and American fighter jets can use allied carriers.

"The U.S. Navy has enough challenges maintaining its current presence," Mr. Neill said, and "rotational capabilities from other fleets" can fill gaps.

With the U.S. military facing security challenges on a global playing field while Beijing concentrates its forces as an Asian power, regional democracies will have to raise their game. The big players on China's western and eastern flanks are recognizing that and are drilling their jet fighters.

Japan is pledging to double its defense spend to the NATO standard of 2% of gross domestic product by 2028. Although India's closeness to Russia disappoints many, the world's biggest democracy is strongly postured against China.

All this means more — and deeper — alliances are needed.

"A snapshot quantitative look misses the point," said Mr. Heydarian. "What we have to look at is the trend line and look at China."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Chinese scramble for Covid treatment
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/17/chinese-scramble-find-leading-covid-19-treatment-a/
GIST	<p>Patients in China are scrambling to find a leading antiviral medication for the coronavirus after the country pivoted from its zero-COVID policies without having stocked up on a key treatment the U.S. and other Western nations enjoy.</p> <p>The Pfizer antiviral Paxlovid is covered by state insurance and should cost the equivalent of \$29, but the drug is hard to access and some patients have reported paying huge markups, according to Reuters, which documented the experiences of patients and families.</p> <p>One man in Hainan province said he paid nearly \$3,000 for two boxes of Paxlovid, which is a combination of two drugs and reduced the risk of hospitalization by 90% in clinical trials. Boxes are sold online for the equivalent of about \$320 U.S. dollars but are snapped up quickly.</p> <p>China is adjusting on the fly to its pivot from a strict containment strategy to looser policies that have allowed the virus to rip through society.</p> <p>Scientists are worried about the unfolding toll, given the lack of immunity from prior infection and the belief that Chinese vaccines aren't as effective as the messenger-RNA shots deployed in the West.</p> <p>Many Chinese residents will take trips to see relatives for Lunar New Year celebrations this month, meaning the virus or its variants could travel with them to new areas.</p> <p>Paxlovid was approved in 2021 and gradually became the treatment of choice, particularly for elderly persons, in the U.S. over the past year. The White House boasted it secured sufficient supply to weather any winter surge in infections.</p>

	<p>China, meanwhile, is stuck playing catchup. It recently approved a leading COVID-19 drug from Merck & Co., while Pfizer has said it shipped thousands of courses to the country and millions more are on their way.</p> <p>“Pfizer is actively collaborating with Chinese authorities and all stakeholders to secure an adequate supply of Paxlovid in China,” the company told Reuters. “We remain committed to fulfilling the COVID-19 treatment needs of Chinese patients and partnering with the Chinese government.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Fentanyl in record Seattle homeless deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article271246207.html
GIST	<p>A record 310 homeless people died in the Seattle area last year, highlighting the region's struggle to house the thousands of people living on its streets.</p> <p>The 310 deaths in King County surpassed the previous record of 195 homeless deaths set in 2018, the Seattle Times reported, and marked a 65% jump over 2021.</p> <p>“That’s just appalling,” the paper quoted Chloe Gale, policy and strategy vice president for REACH, the largest homelessness outreach provider in Seattle, as saying.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said it underscores his administration’s urgent need to get more people indoors.</p> <p>Fentanyl-related overdoses accounted for more than half of the deaths. Many people had a combination of fentanyl and other drugs such as meth or cocaine in their system, the paper reported, citing records from the King County Medical Examiner’s Office.</p> <p>Eighteen homeless people died by homicide, a number that more than doubled from 2021. Thirty-five people died from natural causes at a much younger age than is typical. The average age of death for homeless people was 48, the medical examiner found. Ten people died from hypothermia or exposure, and seven died from suicide.</p> <p>The county has directed its public health, human services and homelessness agencies to survey homeless providers to find out what is needed to help curb fatal overdoses.</p> <p>The county is also increasing funding for harm-reduction efforts.</p> <p>Last year, Public Health – Seattle & King County distributed more than 10,000 kits of naloxone, a medication that can reverse opioid overdoses, and about 100,000 fentanyl test strips. The agency is leading public awareness campaigns about the synthetic opioid and helping people find treatment.</p> <p>Fentanyl has been driving overdose fatalities in the county more broadly, regardless of people's housing status.</p> <p>As of November, it was involved in 70% of all confirmed overdose deaths in the county in 2022, according to a recent report by Public Health – Seattle & King County.</p> <p>Brad Finegood, who leads the agency's opioid and overdose response, said researchers keep watching the monthly overdose numbers, hoping to see rates flatten out.</p> <p>“Maybe we’re plateauing at a really bad rate and maybe it’s going to get worse,” Finegood said. “I don’t know when it’s going to stop.” The point-in-time count conducted in the county last year found that 13,368 people were living outside.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Microsoft to cut engineering jobs?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/microsoft/microsoft-to-cut-engineering-jobs-this-week-as-layoffs-go-deeper/
GIST	<p>Microsoft plans to cut jobs in a number of engineering divisions on Wednesday, according to a person familiar with the matter, joining the ranks of technology giants that are scaling back as the industry prepares for a prolonged slump in demand.</p> <p>The magnitude of the cuts wasn't clear, but the person, who asked not to be identified discussing confidential matters, said the reduction will be significantly larger than other rounds at Microsoft in the past year. Those cuts impacted less than 1% of the software giant's workforce of more than 200,000.</p> <p>Microsoft most recently shrank its workforce in October and July, and has eliminated open positions and paused hiring in various groups. While technology peers such as Amazon, Meta Platforms and Salesforce have announced cuts by the thousands in the past few months, Redmond-based Microsoft has so far been taking smaller steps to deal with a worsening global economic outlook and the potential for a protracted slowdown in demand for software and services.</p> <p>A representative for Microsoft declined to comment. Sky News earlier reported the company was planning to cut thousands of jobs, and Insider reported that Microsoft could reduce its recruiting staff by as much as a third.</p> <p>Microsoft is forecast to post a sales gain of 2% in the fiscal second quarter when it reports earnings on Jan. 24. That would be the slowest revenue increase since fiscal 2017. Since then, Microsoft's cloud-computing business has fueled a resurgence in growth, but even that business has begun to decelerate in the past year.</p> <p>Still, the company has waited longer than many other technology leaders to significantly slash staff. Cloud rival Amazon is laying off more than 18,000 employees — the biggest reduction in its history. Facebook parent Meta announced widespread job cuts last fall, and beleaguered social network Twitter has slashed about half its workforce. Corporate cloud-software maker Salesforce laid off about 10% of workers earlier this month.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 Downtown Seattle Nike store to close
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/downtown-seattle-nike-store-to-close-at-end-of-week/
GIST	<p>The downtown Nike store is shuttering its doors on Friday, marking an end to the storefront's decadeslong presence in Seattle.</p> <p>"We look forward to serving you at Nike.com," read a sign posted in the store windows Tuesday.</p> <p>The store at Sixth Avenue and Pike Street has been a downtown staple since it opened in 1996. Even before the store opened as NikeTown, a 1994 Seattle Times article called the retailer a "different kind of store" that promised to revive the downtown street corner.</p> <p>Nike did not respond to a request for comment Tuesday on why the store is closing.</p> <p>Nike filed plans for a new full-scale store at Factoria mall in Bellevue last year, according to the Puget Sound Business Journal. The store is now open.</p> <p>The closure is another blow to the heart of Seattle's retail and business core, still recovering from pandemic effects. Monthly visitors fell to less than 500,000 in April 2020 from more than 2 million before the pandemic's onset, according to data collected by the Downtown Seattle Association.</p>

	<p>“We never like to see a downtown retailer choose to close and NikeTown has been a great part of our retail mix through the years,” said a statement from the Downtown Seattle Association. “We are excited about several newcomers who have opened their doors in recent months with more on the way.”</p> <p>As downtown recovers, safety concerns have caused several stores, including multiple Starbucks locations, to close their doors.</p> <p>“To help foster [businesses’] success we need to ensure a safe and welcoming environment, something that’s been improving in downtown and is top of mind for our city leaders,” the Downtown Seattle Association statement read.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 Amazon slashes new HR system teams
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/amazon-slashed-hr-teams-built-to-help-warehouse-workers/
GIST	<p>In August, Amazon rolled out a new system to help its warehouse workers connect with a human — rather than a chatbot — when they had questions about things like time cards or time off.</p> <p>Amazon’s goal? Respond to questions within 10 seconds.</p> <p>For warehouse workers, the COVID-19 pandemic — and the unprecedented number of questions about sick time and corporate policies — exposed flaws in the system that left some workers confused about how or why they were fired, and unable to reach anyone who could fix mistakes. Strict attendance rules, workplace expectations and high injury rates mean warehouse workers are often searching for answers that can be elusive in a network that includes thousands of warehouse associates.</p> <p>Less than six months after launching the new system as another resource for those warehouse associates, Amazon trimmed the workforce in charge of responding to those questions.</p> <p>As part of a wave of layoffs that could total 18,000 workers, Amazon is cutting from its human resources department, including teams meant to assist warehouse workers with everything from terminations to protected leave to questions about day-to-day operations. Most of the 1.5 million people in Amazon’s global workforce are hourly workers.</p> <p>In November, the company offered voluntary buyouts to some employees in the HR team, which Amazon calls People, Experience and Technology Solutions. Workers who accepted the package signed off for the last time at the end of December.</p> <p>Earlier this month, CEO Andy Jassy said Amazon would continue making cuts, naming HR and the company’s stores division as places that would see more layoffs.</p> <p>For a mostly remote team that Amazon calls its Regional Centers, the cuts mean fewer people to help answer questions from the network of warehouse employees who turn to HR for assistance. Most Amazon warehouses have an on-site HR employee or team to answer immediate questions. But employees can also contact the Regional Center if those teams are jammed or unable to answer the question.</p> <p>That’s important for workers in the warehouses who are often told to turn to an app rather than the on-site HR rep to get answers, according to Khali Jama, who works at an Amazon fulfillment center in Minnesota.</p> <p>Jama, who testified at a hearing in support of legislation to establish new worker safety requirements in Minnesota, said she had trouble securing time off when she came down with a fever during a shift. Jama was able to untangle the trail of paperwork and policies, she said at the hearing, but many of her co-workers have struggled to do so. Working with HR is even harder for employees who speak English as a second language.</p>

“You don’t get to talk to people, you get to deal with an app that tells you what to do and not to do,” Jama said.

Applying for leave, for example, “you apply for this thing expecting they’re going to come back to me and understand why I didn’t go to work today,” she continued. “No. Next thing you know you are fired.”

Amazon fired 25 people at her facility in one week in January, she continued. Every Sunday, she has new co-workers.

The Regional Centers for HR are split up by responsibilities — some people process terminations, others process resignations, others answer questions — and by region, helping warehouse workers contact the group closest to them. Amazon declined to say how many HR Regional Centers it has, how many people are staffing those facilities or how many of those jobs will be cut.

“We’re always innovating to create a more positive experience for our employees while also meeting our evolving business needs,” spokesperson Jennifer Flagg said. “We have a number of ways for employees to get assistance from a HR issue area expert when they have questions and we continue to hear positive feedback about these services.”

Flagg said over 86% of employees surveyed in December said they “had a frustration free experience” with the Employee Resource Center, another avenue for finding answers.

But it takes warehouse workers three or four hours to connect with a regional center representative on the phone, based on research from an advocate for Amazon warehouse associates who asked to remain anonymous out of a concern that Amazon would retaliate against them.

Sara Fee, who works at Amazon’s San Bernardino, California, facility, said on-site HR can be hard to reach. Workers there don’t have a phone number to call and recently were given an email address to contact their representative.

Fee relies on HR for help signing off on missed time when the weather gets so bad she can’t leave her home in the mountains. Generally, she has to go through multiple prompts before getting connected to a human, Fee said. Those prompts often push her toward an automated bot or offer to send a text message with a written policy.

Sometimes, she is redirected to the same recording three or four times before she reaches a person, Fee said.

When news of the buyout package offered to HR workers hit employees’ inboxes in November, Amazon wasn’t clear about what the cuts mean for the volume of work handled by the team, according to two former employees who took the voluntary separation package. Both workers asked to remain anonymous to protect new jobs.

One of those employees, who oversaw the team responsible for answering warehouse associates’ questions, asked management if Amazon would change expectations as the team slimmed down. Would management extend the 10-second threshold for answering a new question? “Do we have anything in place to try to make this work better,” they remember asking. “The answer was no.”

“The volume of what we do hasn’t gone down,” they continued. “My team lost around 50% of our volume. It’s a lot of people doing a lot of extra work, trying to figure out how to make this work, until whatever the future looks like happens.”

In October, about two months before Amazon offered the buyout, that employee’s team started working with another group meant to take on questions involving timekeeping and attendance. When that employee left at the end of December, that transition still hadn’t happened, they said.

Like many teams at Amazon, employees at the HR Regional Centers had productivity goals, both former employees said. Workers would aim to answer new inquiries to the live chat feature within 10 seconds, process a resignation in two hours and close an HR case within four hours.

The team that processed terminations had eight minutes, according to another former employee who worked on that group.

In those eight minutes, employees had to get up to speed on the situation – when the warehouse associate had last worked, if they had workers’ compensation, if they’d asked HR for help – and then research an answer and respond.

Sending a response back before the eight-minute timer dinged was considered the bare minimum, that former employee said. Most workers aimed to move faster.

“In the warehouse, [it’s] how many boxes you can scan in an hour, a minute,” they said. “HR ... is the same thing. How many cases can you work? Not a single question was: Can you save this person? It’s just: ‘How fast can you do this case?’ ”

Amazon has said it does not use quotas for its workers, regardless of whether they are in a warehouse or on the HR team.

To move cases faster, many people sent reply emails that were simply a pre-written template, the former worker said.

Sometimes, they would find cases where they would want to make an exception. If a warehouse associate was 10 minutes late but didn’t have any unpaid time off left to use, for example, those 10 minutes would kick off a termination. In those cases, there weren’t many options.

“I would say 90% of all the terminations were rightfully done,” the former employee said. “But there’s always that 10% that we could have done better, or [had] that more human touch.”

At times, the department felt more like a “robot reviewing a case” than an HR team, they continued. As an example of how “dehumanizing the process” was, they said their colleagues would communicate about cases using a warehouse worker’s ID number rather than their name.

The formula began with AA, or Amazon associate, and a case number. For example, the former employee said, it might read “AA123 case ID456 has replied to outreach saying that they are homeless.”

In November, that employee applied for the voluntary buyout to resign from the Amazonian Experience and Technology team, the prong of HR where they worked. When they got an email confirming they had been accepted, it didn’t include their own name. Instead, it began “Dear employee.”

On Wednesday, Amazon will start notifying the next round of workers slated to lose their jobs, according to a blog post from Jassy earlier this month. Those layoffs will affect several teams, including the human resources department.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Some homeless view SEA source of shelter
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/for-some-without-a-home-sea-tac-airport-is-a-source-of-shelter/
GIST	<p>The homelessness crisis in Seattle is often highly visible, with many people living in camps, tents and RVs. But there are those who are trying to stay invisible, often hiding in the jam of travel at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.</p> <p>The Port of Seattle told KUOW it’s trying to direct these people into temporary shelter but there are few places in the area for people to go.</p>

A cold wind howls down the tunnel that leads from the light rail station to the airport. That's where Miguel Mendoza is walking as travelers rush by to catch a flight. On a chilly night like this one, Mendoza said he does what he can to stay warm.

"Sometimes I spend nights walking, all night buses," Mendoza said with a backpack slung over one shoulder. "You know, just traveling on buses, trains."

On that night, he took light rail to the airport, where he planned to find a bench and get some sleep. Mendoza said he has slept at the airport a few times before.

"Not often, no, because the police ... they see you're sleeping or whatever, they kick you out," he said.

Police and having to sleep in a chair are two reasons Mendoza doesn't really like to come to the airport — but he has few other options.

At one point, he was staying at a shelter in Seattle. That was a temporary severe weather shelter that only opened during the recent cold snap.

"They opened a few shelters for the bad weather, like it was snowing, but it was for a week, less than a week, and then it is very hard to get a shelter, very hard," Mendoza said.

A year ago, Mendoza was working as a chef and living at a motel close to the airport. But then he got really sick and lost his job, he said. At the airport, he still had a cough and wasn't sure if it was a cold, the flu or COVID-19.

The night Mendoza spoke to KUOW, he found a bench in baggage claim, away from the luggage carousels and near a wall. He sat in a chair and kept a close eye on his backpack.

Asked if he feels unsafe at the airport, Mendoza said: "Yes, well I mean, like, you don't know what's going to happen. If I had money, I'd go to a motel and feel safe there. But this is like public."

One reason Mendoza and others seek shelter at the airport is that it's easy to blend in. On this night, the baggage claim area was packed with exhausted-looking people carrying lots of bags. Most were travelers waiting on delayed flights. But some were people like De Chung, who sleeps at the airport nearly every night.

"I don't know where to go," Chung said. "Outside is too cold and there's rain."

He tries to keep a low profile and not get thrown out. He said he gets along with airport security because they don't ask him to leave but Port of Seattle police do.

Mendoza and Chung are among dozens of homeless people who come to the airport to get out of the cold. The exact figure isn't clear, as the port says it does not "have the ability to keep accurate statistics on the number of people experiencing homelessness." A spokesperson said they hope to have more data in the coming months.

An airport may feel like a public space but Port of Seattle police Officer Michelle Bregel said in March that unsheltered people are coming in and, "not really realizing that they're trespassing on private property."

Last year, the port brought Bregel on as a full-time crisis coordinator. In March, she said her job was to "help [unsheltered people] connect to family, give them resources on finding shelters, get them connected to behavioral health providers, or the local hospital if necessary."

Nearly everyone who was at the airport the same night as Chung and Mendoza said they hadn't been referred to a shelter before, only led to the door by port police.

Bregel said the port is concerned about the safety of travelers. This past December, the Transportation Security Administration said an unhoused person got past an airport security checkpoint and into an employee area. The incident caused delays during peak holiday travel.

Another person finding shelter at the airport was Ben Hall, who was smoking a cigarette outside the international terminal. Hall said there's not much to do when sleeping overnight at the airport.

"It's boring and it's hard to lay down and close your eyes," he said while watching cars drive away.

Throughout the night, Hall moved around the departure and arrival areas quite a bit, first sleeping in a chair, then on the floor behind a vending machine.

He said he has run into Bregel a few times.

"There's one lady here who's a cop, who's always trying to hook me up and help me out and I'm gonna let her," Hall said, putting out his cigarette. "I'm gonna let her do it."

Hall said after months of cajoling from Bregel, he would head to Veterans Affairs the next day to hopefully set up housing.

He said as a veteran, he feels lucky to have that option. A lot of people are on long wait lists for temporary shelter, not even long-term housing. The area surrounding the airport has very few options for people seeking shelter. The King County Regional Homelessness Authority database shows there are no shelters available in SeaTac or Tukwila for people to go.

Even Bregel said it's difficult to know where to direct people.

"Unfortunately, a lot of the services that are available in the area are struggling due to low staffing," she said.

Bregel said she interacts with a few regulars who come back night after night, but most people just pass through. It's hard to reach every person who comes through a busy airport.

The port says it is taking steps to bolster its SEA Cares program and add more people like Bregel to help unsheltered people once they leave the airport. The agency hired a mental health responder in November and added more crisis intervention training for port officers.

But Miguel Mendoz said he doesn't need a crisis coordinator or more police. He said he needs to get healthy so he can get a chef job again and afford to move back into a motel. The next day, he was headed to an interview at a restaurant.

"I just want to feel better for tomorrow, I hope. And this time tomorrow, I do my thing," he said.

He sat back in his chair and stifled a cough as he watched travelers shuffle by.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Flu, Covid trends in western WA
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/we-made-it-through-the-holidays-what-do-wa-flu-and-covid-trends-look-like-now/
GIST	Flu trends in King County appear to have peaked for now, but epidemiologists say our already unusual viral season means the next few months could still be unpredictable.

The region's respiratory infection season hit harder and earlier than usual this fall, but recent county data provides some evidence that flu is subsiding in King County — or at least round one of it. During the first week of January, epidemiologists counted about 183 flu-positive tests, compared to more than 2,000 in late November.

[Snohomish](#) and [Pierce](#) counties have also confirmed a recent decline in flu cases, in addition to other respiratory viruses, like RSV and rhinovirus.

While it's too early to solidify statewide trends, the Department of Health's [weekly influenza surveillance update](#) reports flu-like activity is much lower in Washington than it was in December, though deaths have increased.

The downward trend is encouraging, said Dr. Eric Chow, King County's chief of communicable disease epidemiology. Still, he added residents should remember a few factors when looking at recent data.

"In general, we're in a much better place than where we were earlier in the season," Chow said. "From a public health standpoint and knowing the certain types of limitations that these types of surveillance purport, we interpret these with caution, particularly for the last couple weeks."

For example, fewer new flu samples may have been collected over the holidays, as people opted to spend time with family or travel instead of visiting health clinics and getting tested, Chow said. In addition, clinics might be closed. Weather could be a factor.

Still, drops in other areas of flu surveillance are a "huge relief," he said.

Although the number of collected tests dropped, the proportion of positive tests also fell. As of last week, about 6% of lab tests from area hospitals and clinics had returned positive for influenza, compared to a peak of about 40% in late November, according to county data.

There have also been recent declines in flu-related emergency-department visits and hospitalizations, though levels are still much higher now than they were at this point in past seasons.

Local trends largely reflect what the [rest of the United States is tracking](#), too, Chow said, though the end of flu season could still be a ways off.

Because different strains of influenza often circulate throughout the course of a season, one type might have the ability to surge weeks after another, Chow said. During the 2018-19 season, for example, flu cases dipped nationwide in early January, but reemerged for a second, much stronger surge in March.

And this year has become especially epidemiologically interesting and unpredictable because, along with many other reasons, one strain of influenza B (the Yamagata lineage) appears to have vanished from the world, Chow said.

"We've never really witnessed something like this," he said. "This is very new and very interesting to epidemiologists."

Because the past few months of viral spread have been unusual in many ways, Chow said, it's important not to pronounce the end of flu season too early.

"Otherwise people will have this false notion that their risk of influenza is low," he said. "And, the other thing that's important to note, just because you see a decrease in the trends ... the number of infections remains really high [compared to this point in past seasons]."

Several weeks of downtrends are usually required before epidemiologists call the season, he said, adding that the next month will provide a clearer picture of how viruses spread during our holiday season.

Where are we with COVID?

COVID cases have been on the rise in King County since Christmas, jumping over 25% in two weeks, though hospitalizations are much lower than they were in mid-December.

But emerging variants, particularly the omicron XBB.1.5 subvariant, are still a concern, Chow said. XBB.1.5, [nicknamed the “kraken” variant](#), emerged in New York several months ago, hitting the East Coast harder than in Washington, though it is circulating here and is expected to soon become the dominant strain in the region, UW Medicine virologist Dr. Alex Greninger said in a statement earlier this month.

“We’ve had a large respiratory virus season with RSV and influenza, and now it looks like it’s going to be sort of a COVID wave of infections in January” because of the XBB.1.5 subvariant, Greninger said.

XBB.1.5 has mainly sparked concern among epidemiologists because of its transmissibility, Chow said.

“Early studies had suggested that when the number of infections of XBB.1.5 increase, there seems to be a corresponding increase in hospitalizations, but we’re still waiting on additional data to make that definitive connection,” he said.

Early evidence has also shown some monoclonal antibodies, including Evusheld, are less effective against the new subvariant — though COVID vaccinations, including bivalent boosters, and other antivirals, like Paxlovid and remdesivir, are still effective, Greninger said.

Many of Public Health — Seattle & King County’s COVID vaccine clinics have closed, but [Auburn’s Outlet Collection mall](#) still takes appointments and drop-ins Fridays through Mondays from 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.

While the worst of fall’s flu surge has passed, Chow still recommends masking indoors, especially in crowded, indoor spaces, for the time being.

“Indoor masking, and masking in general, is still really critical because we still have high numbers of respiratory viruses,” he said. “We have to remind people that we started off really, really high [in flu levels], so even though we’re coming down, the numbers of infections are still likely to be high.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Derogatory Native women site name change
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/washington-features-derogatory-word-native-american-women-renamed/281-a9dd7d98-962a-4c6e-9e14-45237343fa02
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — Nine tribal proposals to rename features across Washington state that once bore a derogatory term for Native American women were approved by the Board of Natural Resources Tuesday. The various features include mountains, rivers, lakes and creeks across the state.</p> <p>The proposals from tribes came in the wake of the U.S. Department of the Interior’s orders in 2021 to rename geographic features throughout the country to remove the derogatory term.</p> <p>The word “sq---” was declared derogatory in November 2021 by Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, who established the federal renaming process.</p> <p>“By changing these names, we ensure that Washington’s geography will continue to reflect the history of Native American women on our landscape, but with the dignity and respect these women deserve,” said Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz, the elected official who chairs the Board of Natural Resources. “The beautiful, thoughtful cultural legacy these names provide to us all would not have been possible without the time, effort, and support that our state’s tribes have provided throughout this process.”</p>

The renaming process has not been completed. [Nine out of the original 18 proposals have yet to be approved.](#)

According to the Department of Natural Resources, they are still working with the tribes to find a resolution for the nine remaining proposals.

Changes from Confederated Tribes and Bands of Yakama Nation

- The pair of Columbia River islands in Klickitat County is now named Sq'wanana, meaning "two sitting on lap."
- The Skamania County lake southeast of Blue Lake is now named Aalvic Wahtum, after Lucille Aalvic. She was the first officially enrolled citizen of the Yakama Nation.
- The Skamania County butte is now named Pataniks Pushtye, referencing the name of Lulukash, the child of the woman for whom the nearby twin buttes are named.
- The Skamania County creek along East Canyon Ridge is now named Timla Wapykt from the traditional name of the adjacent butte, Timla-Timla Pushtye, meaning "little heart mountain of that shape."
- The Skamania County stream that flows into the Little White Salmon River is now named Shluxiksikswana, meaning "the eating place," after the name of the Klickitat village site within the drainage.

Changes from the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

- The peak in Columbia County is now named Wenaha Peak after the Wenaha River, which runs below. Wenaha is a Cayuse place name, and the peak is in the traditional territory of the Chief Joseph Band of Nez Perce.
- The peak in Okanogan County is now named Condon Mountain, after a well-established family in the Kartar Valley on the Colville Reservation.
- The creek in Stevens County is now named Snqilt Creek, after the name for the area above Little Dalles to Northport where the creek is located.

Change from the Quinault Indian Nation

The derogatorily named creek in Jefferson County is now named Noskeliikuu, meaning "the place where the whale dropped." The name has been used in Quinault tribal histories for at least four generations.

In addition to the nine proposals for new names, Reads Bay in San Juan County is now named to Reeds Bay. The change corrects the spelling of the name to that of Tacee and John P. Reed, the first settlers on Decatur Island in the late 1860s.

Washingtonians were able to provide public comment on the matter in 2021.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 California: first storms, now mudslides
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/california-rain-mudslides-flooding/
GIST	<p>The deluge has stopped after California's ninth atmospheric river storm in recent weeks, but the danger remains.</p> <p>A mudslide stopped a commuter train in Sunol in its tracks and more than 200 passengers onboard had to be evacuated.</p> <p>In Berkeley, mud poured through resident Marjorie Cruz's home of more than 20 years, making it one of eight in the area deemed unlivable.</p> <p>"We are just at the mercy of this mud and hoping and praying and keeping our fingers crossed that it doesn't take the rest of my house out," Cruz said.</p> <p>Since New Year's Day, California has experienced more than 500 landslides, spanning the entire state.</p>

"Once you've had a lot of rain and the sponge is full, then the next rainstorm that comes in, the bar is lower for triggering new landslides," said University of Washington geologist David Montgomery.

The present danger is rooted in the past.

In 2005, a mudslide in La Conchita, not far from Ojai, swallowed up the community with no warning, killing 10 people. Nearly a decade later, one of the nation's worst-ever mudslides in the town of Oso, Washington, killed 43, also without warning.

"It was the rain in the month before that ended up triggering it," Montgomery said. "So the hazard doesn't go away when the rain stops."

The record rain also brings the hazard of flooding, causing roads to buckle, sinkholes to open up and boulders to crash down.

Ojai resident John Sehon said he was checking water levels around his home every 20 minutes while it rained, "making sure it wasn't going to rise up on me real fast and catch me by surprise."

[Return to Top](#)

Cyber, Tech Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 FTX: \$415M of crypto hacked
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/crypto/ftx-says-415-million-crypto-was-hacked-rcna66211
GIST	<p>Bankrupt crypto firm FTX said on Tuesday that \$415 million worth of crypto was hacked from the exchange's accounts, representing a sizeable portion of the identified assets the company is trying to recover.</p> <p>In a presentation titled "Maximizing FTX Recoveries," lawyers and advisors for FTX debtors updated the total liquid assets identified for recovery, and said they're valued at about \$5.5 billion.</p> <p>However, that includes "unauthorized third-party transfers" of \$323 million out of FTX.com (the international business) and \$90 million out of FTX US, the company said in a statement. Another \$2 million of hedge fund Alameda Research's crypto was also stolen. The missing crypto could be connected to a hack of FTX's systems that was uncovered shortly after the company collapsed in November.</p> <p>At the time, the stolen crypto was valued at \$477 million, according to blockchain analytics firm Elliptic.</p> <p>FTX filed for bankruptcy after a wave of withdrawals crippled the exchange and sister hedge fund Alameda. Founder and ex-CEO Sam Bankman-Fried was indicted by federal prosecutors on fraud and money laundering charges in December. Bankman-Fried pleaded not guilty to the charges in January, and he's released on a \$250 million bond ahead of his trial, which is set for October.</p> <p>FTX's advisors are also reviewing a \$2.1 billion share repurchase payment from FTX to crypto exchange Binance in the third quarter of 2021. Binance was the first outside investor in FTX, but Bankman-Fried bought out Binance's stake in his company in 2021.</p> <p>In an appearance on CNBC in December, Binance CEO Changpeng "CZ" Zhao was asked about the potential \$2.1 billion clawback as part of FTX's bankruptcy proceedings.</p> <p>"I think we'll leave that to the lawyers," Zhao said, when asked if he was prepared to send the money back. "I think our legal team is perfectly capable of handling it."</p>

	<p>The 20-page presentation from FTX’s lawyers and advisers provides a breakdown of FTX’s assets and where they are looking for potential recoveries that could be returned to debtors. That includes hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of property in the Bahamas, where Bankman-Fried lived and ran the company.</p> <p>“We are making important progress in our efforts to maximize recoveries, and it has taken a Herculean investigative effort from our team to uncover this preliminary information,” said John Ray, who’s acting as CEO at FTX during the restructuring, in Tuesday’s statement.</p> <p>Despite separating liquid from illiquid tokens, the presentation included \$529 million worth of FTX’s self-issued token, FTT, under the exchange’s “liquid” assets. FTT has lost over 90% of its value since early November.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 CISA Infrastructure on recent threats
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/hstoday-ga-cisa-infrastructure-security-leader-mussington-on-recent-critical-infrastructure-threats/
GIST	<p>Dr. David Mussington serves as the Executive Assistant Director for Infrastructure Security at the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). Since February 2021, he continues to lead CISA’s efforts to secure the nation’s critical infrastructure in coordination with government and the private sector. Key areas of focus include vulnerability and risk assessments; securing public gatherings; developing and conducting training and exercises; and securing high-risk chemical facilities.</p> <p>Immediately prior to joining CISA, Mussington was Professor of the Practice and Director for the Center for Public Policy and Private Enterprise at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy. His research and teaching activities focused on integrated cyber physical system risk management, election cybersecurity, and critical infrastructure security risk management. He formerly served as the U.S. Department of Defense Senior Adviser for Cyber Policy and on the Obama administration’s National Security Council staff as Director for Surface Transportation Security Policy.</p> <p>With 16 critical infrastructure sectors defined by CISA as vital to security, national economic security, and/or national public health or safety, HSToday sat down with Mussington to discuss critical infrastructure threats and risk mitigation.</p> <p>Q: Recent propaganda from domestic violent extremists has encouraged and provided instructions for attacks on a variety of critical infrastructure sectors. How do you view these threats and how is CISA working with sectors on protection?</p> <p>A: I view these threats pretty seriously. I think that they’ve been visible; the narrative of the threats is serious and has been in NTAS [National Terrorism Advisory System] bulletins for a while. And, unfortunately, of course, we’re seeing attacks that resemble those that we’ve been warned about for a while. CISA’s role is that we’re involved in mitigating physical and cyber risks to critical infrastructure, so we’re concerned about priority infrastructure across the 16 critical infrastructure sectors — of which, of course, we are SRMA [Sector Risk Management Agency] for eight. That concern is because we’re worried about what violent extremists might be able to do to critical infrastructure in terms of disruption of critical services, and we obviously provide guidance as practice input to critical stakeholders, critical infrastructure operators, to allow them to mitigate risk and exercise self-help. So concerning? Definitely. Presaged or foreshadowed by warnings from DHS or the DHS level for more than a year. Unfortunately, it’s confirmation of the threats that we’ve been worried about.</p> <p>Q: How can critical infrastructure sectors address the potential for insider threats, including employees radicalized after the point of hire?</p> <p>A: We think that the best way to mitigate those sorts of threats is through a systematic program. Ad hoc activities are just likely to be not scalable, so if you operate a critical infrastructure, which is, of course, a system of systems, you need to be able to have a predictable way of managing insider risks, and that</p>

means using insider threat framework with elements such as defining a threat, detecting and identifying that threat, having an assessment program for that threat and managing the threat and risk should it occur.

Q: What unique vulnerabilities do chemical facilities face and how can they defend against these threats?

A: So I think the focus needs to shift a little bit from chemical facilities because people holding the concerning chemical, as under the CFATS chemical facilities antiterrorism standards regime, are beyond simple facilities — not that it's just a factory that looks like it has towers with vapor coming from them; that's sort of not an accurate or effective perspective of where the risk lies. Because we use chemicals in so many different parts of the U.S. economy, from retail to industrial processes, there's a certain level of vulnerability that we have to live with. What we need to worry about or focus on is those who will weaponize potentially dangerous chemicals that have dual use or perfectly permissible and legal applications. So think about people who misuse chemicals to construct IEDs. Think about people who would use their access to chemicals for illicit purposes, for crime. It's those use cases that we need to focus on as well as a limited number of chemicals themselves that are regulated through the CFATS framework.

Q: What did your time in the transportation sector show you about the unique threats and protection issues faced by ground transportation infrastructure?

A: What it showed is that some people think that transportation is simply a physical infrastructure security challenge without noticing that transportation, like most of the other critical infrastructures we have, are actually converged cyber-physical systems with internet-facing elements, with applications, IoT or internet of things, and industrial technology — basic systems from railroad locomotives to switching to routing to how eventually hazardous cargos are moved around in specially reinforced vehicles and train cars. I think that from the freight side, from the mass transit side, and from the inter-city passenger rail side, it's important to keep track of the increasing cyberization, I suppose, or the integration of cyber technologies into all aspects of those systems. That means that they have potential risk exposure to the same IT and OT vulnerabilities that non-transportation critical infrastructures have. So a lot of the best-practice guidance that we publish through our publications, through our outreach, to sector stakeholders and to state, local, territorial and tribal authorities also pertain to transportation as well; obviously, in this case, DHS and DOT are both co-SRMAs so we have special risk-management responsibilities for the sector. But the guidance is still consistent — based on standards, based on best practices, and based on the risk experience of the sector both at home and abroad.

Q: What are some critical cyber threats being faced by infrastructure sectors?

A: It's fair to say that the more devices you connect to industrial systems the more there's a potentially expanded attack surface that can be exploited by adversaries. So that point — unsecured or less well secured IT and OT systems being connected to the internet — is a key vector that adversaries can use to get access to data, key systems, and availability of systems to impede the American public's access to key services. For example, ransomware that gets in because of poor cybersecurity on computers. One thing about OT systems — obviously, these are different and have different up time and other responsibilities — is that should they be victimized by internet-exposed systems that aren't adequately protected they can be persistently implanted by advanced adversaries. That allows that adversary to basically penetrate a system and then go quiet for an extended period of time enabling a future option that may be either ransomware or some other nefarious activity at the attacker's point of decision. We may not know or have a very difficult time detecting the persistent access of a sophisticated actor under that scenario. And we also have to worry about cyber intrusions that allow manipulation of information — here, that's more of a deception or spoofing scenario where key systems can be made to misbehave. You can think of water treatment systems or other systems where critical infrastructures can be made to deceive operators into thinking they're in one state of operation when they're actually in another, causing impairment of function and system availability that can have some economic and other consequences.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Report: 59M payment card records for sale
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/59-4-million-compromised-payment-card-records-posted-for-sale-on-dark-web-in-2022-report/

Nearly 60 million compromised payment card records were posted for sale on dark web platforms in 2022, according to new [report](#).

Researchers with Recorded Future's Insikt Group said the numbers were actually a stark decrease compared to the numbers seen in 2021, which reached almost 100 million compromised payment card records. The Record is an editorially independent unit of Recorded Future.

Hackers physically compromise merchant devices to steal payment card data to facilitate Card-Present (CP) transactions. While cybercriminals typically use digital compromises — often with Magecart e-skimmer infections — to steal card data from online Card-Not-Present (CNP) transactions.

For 2022, Insikt researchers found 45.6 million CNP and 13.8 million CP payment card records posted for sale to carding shops on the dark web. There were 60 million CNP and 36 million CP records in 2021.

"Russia's cybercrime crackdown — followed promptly by its full-scale invasion of Ukraine — spawned lower carding volumes for the remainder of the year. As war in Ukraine hampered cybercriminals' ability to engage in card fraud, one top-tier carding shop exploited the lull in supply by flooding the market with recycled payment card records," the researchers theorized.

"Frustrated by these records' low quality, resourceful threat actors may nevertheless use them as cheap sources of personally identifiable information (PII) that they can weaponize to carry out targeted account takeover (ATO) attacks against their victims."

CP breaches in 2022 overwhelmingly affected small restaurants and bars but were down 62% compared to 2021. The researchers said the numbers have steadily declined over the years "due to the rising global adoption of more secure in-person payment methods."

Contactless payment, EMV chips and the general decrease in in-person transactions have all contributed to the decrease, according to the researchers. The overall decrease in activity was attributed to several raids in January and February 2022 by Russian law enforcement to shut down several top-end carding shops.

"Given that the crackdown occurred during Russia's troop buildup on the Ukrainian border, the governing theory is that Russia sought to signal its intent to cooperate with the West against cybercrime should the West acquiesce to Russian demands regarding Ukraine," the researchers theorized.

The carding activity rebounded slightly once the invasion began but faced new hurdles — like forums being flooded with "low-quality" cards that had already expired.

There was yet another slump in activity around April, with the war likely inhibiting the ability of actors in Ukraine and Russia to continue normal levels of card fraud activity.

The researchers said Russian-occupied areas of the Donbas region of Ukraine were long suspected to have hosted cybercriminal server infrastructure and the damage done to internet infrastructure — on top of the danger of war and migration — likely contributed to the decrease.

CNP mostly targeted online ordering platforms — Recorded Future's Magecart Overwatch discovered 1,520 unique malicious domains involved in the infections of 9,290 unique e-commerce domains at any point in 2022. Most involved campaigns that saw groups use fake payment card forms or take over legitimate merchant web infrastructure to install e-skimmers.

In one January 2022 campaign, a gang the researchers call Magecart Group 7 launched a campaign where they infected 1,141 websites.

Nearly 900 e-commerce domains have been infected with two e-skimmer variants exploiting Google Tag Manager (GTM) — a legitimate web service used for internet marketing, website usage metrics, and customer tracking.

The researchers said merchants in all 50 states and the District of Columbia were affected, with the heaviest concentrations in major metropolitan areas.”

“Through collaboration with partner financial institutions, Recorded Future reported breaches that exposed customer payment card data at over 1,000 unique merchants in 2022. For 77% of the merchants, we have identified compromised payment cards from the breaches on the dark web,” they said.

The biggest hacks involved the compromise of websites used for online ordering solutions for restaurants and ticketing solutions for entertainment and transportation companies – including sites like MenuDrive and Harbortouch.

Just one Magecart campaign in January infected 80 restaurants using MenuDrive and 74 using Harbortouch. InTouchPOS faced its own Magecart campaign that resulted in e-skimmer infections for 157 restaurants using the platform, according to the report.

Payment card data from transactions at 45 amusement parks was exposed when Core Cashless, an online ticketing platform for amusement parks, was breached. The company acknowledged the breach three months after Recorded Future reported it in July 2022.

In total, the researchers found at least 20.5 million records that had full primary account numbers on dark web forums, pastebins, and social media. Once numbers are verified, hackers either conduct fraudulent transactions or get more personal information that would allow them to fully take over a financial account to withdraw funds.

Recorded Future noted that most hackers who get the compromised payment cards are not the same ones who use it for fraud, typically selling it off in “carding shops.”

“Payment card fraud is an unpredictable, time-consuming process. Fraudsters must operate logistical networks, resell goods and services, devise and execute cash-out schemes, and launder their criminal profits,” the researchers said.

“In 2022, the average infected website saw 5,215 monthly visitors, and according to e-commerce platform BigCommerce, average customer conversion rates range from 2.5 to 3%. If threat actors collect between 130 to 160 cards per month from each of their infected websites, then sell them at an average price of \$15 USD per compromised card, they could easily rake in between \$1,950 and \$2,400 USD per month, per infected website.”

In 2022, 70% of the 59.4 million compromised payment card records were issued by financial institutions in the United States.

Recorded Future predicted that in 2023, the card fraud market will be similarly dependent on world events – arguing that the outcome of the Russia-Ukraine war will likely determine activity.

“Should war continue, threat actors’ ability to engage in card fraud will likely remain degraded,” the researchers said. “Should it end, a renewal or increase in payment card fraud may follow.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 ‘Wacatac’ Trojan in new supply chain attack
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/pypi-users-targeted-wacatac-trojan-new-supply-chain-attack
GIST	<p>Fortinet warns of three new malicious PyPI packages containing code designed to fetch the Wacatac trojan and information stealer as a next stage payload.</p> <p>The three Python packages, ‘colorlib’, ‘httpslib’ and ‘libhttps’ were uploaded to PyPI (Python Package Index) on January 7 and January 12.</p>

All three packages were published by the same author from a user account named ‘Lolip0p’, which joined the repository shortly before the packages were published.

The Python packages feature legitimate-looking descriptions, meant to trick users into believing they are clean. However, Fortinet discovered that all versions of these packages are, in fact, malicious.

Each package, the cybersecurity firm says, contains the same setup.py script and attempt to run a PowerShell script to download an executable binary from an external link.

The download URL has not been flagged as malicious by any of the antivirus products on VirusTotal, but the downloaded file is detected as malicious by a few of them.

Named ‘Oxyz.exe’, the executable has been designed to download another binary, called ‘update.exe’, which is executed from the victim’s temp folder. The binary drops additional files in the same folder.

Both the binary and one of the executables it fetches (SearchProtocolHost.exe) are flagged by several antivirus tools as ‘Wacatac’, a trojan and information stealer that targets login credentials, banking information, and other sensitive information.

[Wacatac](#) can also be used to deploy additional malware on the victim’s machine, including ransomware, and perform other “actions of a malicious hacker’s choice”, according to Microsoft.

“Python end users should always perform due diligence before downloading and running any packages, especially from new authors. And as can be seen, publishing more than one package in a short time period is no indication that an author is reliable,” Fortinet concludes.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Russia war drives 62% slump stolen cards
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/russias-ukraine-62-slump-stolen/
GIST	<p>The Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 appears to have led to a double-digit decrease in stolen payment card records published to the dark web, according to Recorded Future.</p> <p>The firm’s Insikt Group division analyzed detailed threat intelligence gleaned from the cybercrime underground to compile its Annual Payment Fraud Report: 2022.</p> <p>It reported a 24% year-on-year decrease in the volume of card-not-present records on dark web carding shops in 2022 – to 45.6 million – and a 62% slump in card present records, to 13.8 million.</p> <p>Recorded Future traced this significant decline to two key events at the start of the year. The first was an unexpected crackdown by the Russian state on cybercrime groups, which included arrests of suspected members of the REvil ransomware collective.</p> <p>“The governing theory is that Russia sought to signal its intent to cooperate with the West against cybercrime should the West acquiesce to Russian demands regarding Ukraine,” the report claimed.</p> <p>Whatever its intent, the clampdown had a chilling impact on card fraud from the second half of February to April, including the shuttering of several top-tier carding shops, Recorded Future said.</p> <p>However, what came next arguably had an even bigger impact.</p> <p>“After April, slack carding demand and depressed volumes of ‘fresh’ records were likely a result of Russia’s war,” the report continued.</p>

	<p>“It is highly likely that the war has significantly impacted Russian and Ukrainian threat actors’ ability to engage in card fraud as a result of mobilization, refugee and voluntary migration, energy instability, inconsistent internet connectivity and deteriorated server infrastructure. Russian-occupied areas of the Donbas region of Ukraine were long suspected to have hosted cyber-criminal server infrastructure.”</p> <p>As a result, the future of the card fraud market will depend on external events, the report concluded.</p> <p>“Should Russia’s unprovoked war in Ukraine continue, the factors influencing regional threat actors’ ability to engage in card fraud will likely persist, and threat actors’ ability to engage in card fraud will remain lower than before the war, even as they continue to adapt,” it noted.</p> <p>“If the war should end, monitoring the region’s post-war economies will be crucial to determine whether the conditions and incentives exist for a renewal – or possibly even an increase – in card fraud activity.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 Earth Bogle group targets Middle East
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/earth-bogle-targets-middle-east/
GIST	<p>An active campaign using Middle Eastern geopolitical-themed lures to distribute NjRAT (also known as Bladabindi) has been spotted infecting victims across the Middle East and North Africa.</p> <p>Ongoing since at least mid-2022, the campaign was discovered by cybersecurity researchers at Trend Micro, who dubbed the threat "Earth Bogle."</p> <p>Writing in an advisory earlier today (Tuesday), researchers Peter Girnus and Aliakbar Zahravi said the threat actors behind Earth Bogle used public cloud storage services to host malware, but the NjRAT distribution was done via compromised web servers.</p> <p>According to the researchers, the lure files behind the campaign had “exceptionally low detection rates on Virus Total.” This, in turn, allowed the attackers to remain undetected and spread their attacks further.</p> <p>“The group behind the campaign uses public cloud hosting services to host malicious CAB files and uses themed lures to entice Arabic speakers into opening the infected file,” Girnus and Zahravi explained.</p> <p>After downloading the lure file and opening it, victims’ machines are infected with a second-stage dropper, a PowerShell script with various functionalities. This file eventually delivers the final PowerShell dropper responsible for loading the NjRAT binary into memory.</p> <p>The dropper also achieves persistence on an infected system by adding a specific directory to the startup key.</p> <p>“The final payload of this campaign is NjRAT, allowing attackers to conduct a myriad of intrusive activities on infected systems such as stealing sensitive information, taking screenshots, getting a reverse shell, process, registry and file manipulation, uploading/downloading files, and performing other operations,” reads the Trend Micro advisory.</p> <p>To defend against this and similar attacks, Girnus and Zahravi warned organizations to remain vigilant against phishing attacks and skeptical about sensational topics and themes used as lures online.</p> <p>“Users should be wary of opening suspicious archive files such as CAB files, especially from public sources where the risks of compromise are high,” the team explained. “Security teams should be aware of the dynamic nature of conflict zones when considering a security posture.”</p> <p>The Earth Bogle advisory comes weeks after data from Orange Cyberdefense (OCD) showed that cyber extortion is growing exponentially in Africa, the Middle East and China.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 Audit: 78% UK schools in cyber incident
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/three-quarters-uk-schools-cyber/
GIST	<p>Over three-quarters (78%) of UK schools have experienced at least one type of cyber-incident, according to an audit carried out by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and the National Grid for Learning (LGfL).</p> <p>The analysis was a repeat of an audit conducted in 2019, allowing the authors to review the extent of cybersecurity improvements made in schools in recent years.</p> <p>Including insights from more than 800 UK schools, the report found that phishing emails sent to staff or staff being directed to fraudulent websites was experienced by 73% of respondents, which compared to 69% in 2019. This was followed by people impersonating their school emails (26% versus 20% in 2019), malware infection, including viruses or ransomware on any network-connected equipment (21% versus 30%) and important information being made unavailable, whether short-term or permanently (18% versus 35%).</p> <p>Just 7% said their school has ever been significantly disrupted by a cyber-incident or attack.</p> <p>The audit also showcased numerous improvements in security measures in schools. For example, every school surveyed now use firewall protection, 99% use an antivirus solution and 74% use two-factor authentication on their most important accounts.</p> <p>Additionally, over half (57%) of respondents said they gave regular cybersecurity reports to school leaders/governors and 83% have a cybersecurity policy or plan.</p> <p>Over half (53%) of the schools surveyed felt prepared for a cyber-attack.</p> <p>Cyber-attacks on the education sector have ramped up in the past few years, partly as a result of wider attack surfaces brought about by rapid digital transformation programs.</p> <p>Ransomware is a particular challenge for schools, and in early January 2023, it was reported that confidential data from 14 UK schools was leaked online by the threat actor Vice Society after they refused to pay the group's ransom demands.</p> <p>Commenting on the report, Bernard Montel, EMEA technical director and cybersecurity strategist at Tenable said: “The education sector has been in attackers’ crosshairs for a number of years now and it's imperative that those tasked with the security of educational institutions take action to strengthen defenses.</p> <p>“Ransomware gangs will target known but unpatched vulnerabilities in software, such as PrintNightmare. Finding and updating these systems to the latest software version will prevent most attackers from gaining a toehold needed to infiltrate systems. In tandem, finding and protecting sensitive information has to be a priority,” Montel said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 Ransomware attack hits shipping software
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/shipping-software-ransomware-attack/
GIST	<p>On January 7th, DNV, a digital ship management solutions provider, was targeted in a ransomware attack, causing it to take its ShipManager software offline. Users can still use the onboard, offline functionalities of the software, which allow for the construction and operation of ships.</p> <p>The program is normally used for digitally enhanced management of vessels for daily tasks, such as crew oversight, shipping data analytics, dry-docking, and hull integrity inspection.</p>

	<p>In the announcement on its website, the company stated, “There are no indications that any other software or data by DNV is affected. The server outage does not impact any other DNV services.”</p> <p>On January 12th, they issued an update confirming that approximately 1,000 vessels had been affected and that they were in close contact with the 70 affected customers.</p> <p>They further added that they were in contact with the Norwegian police to resolve the incident.</p> <p>To implement a recovery plan and investigate the threat actor behind the attack, DNV is also working with cybersecurity providers and is trying to get ShipManager back online “as soon as possible.”</p> <p>As of yet, the effect of the cyberattack is felt by onshore systems rather than onboard ships. But industry experts caution that this is likely to change as bandwidth improvements enable a stronger interdependence between onshore systems and navigation and other onboard systems.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 Google search ads push info-steal malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-turn-to-google-search-ads-to-push-info-stealing-malware/
GIST	<p>Hackers are setting up fake websites for popular free and open-source software to promote malicious downloads through advertisements in Google search results.</p> <p>At least one prominent user on the cryptocurrency scene has fallen victim to the campaign, claiming it allowed hacker hackers steal all their digital crypto assets along with control over their professional and personal accounts.</p> <p>Over the weekend, crypto influencer Alex, better known by their online persona NFT God, was hacked after launching a fake executable for the Open Broadcaster Software (OBS) video recording and live streaming software they had downloaded from a Google ad in search results.</p> <p>“Nothing happened when I clicked the EXE,” Alex wrote in a Twitter thread recounting their experience over the weekend. However, a few hours later friends alerted them that their Twitter account had been hacked.</p> <p>Unbeknownst to Alex, this was likely an information-stealing malware that stole their saved browser passwords, cookies, Discord tokens, and cryptocurrency wallets and sent them to a remote attacker.</p> <p>Soon, Alex found that their account at the OpenSea NFT marketplace had also been compromised and a different wallet was listed as the owner of one of their digital assets.</p> <p>“I knew at that moment it was all gone. Everything. All my crypto and NFTs ripped from me,” NFT God says in the thread.</p> <p>Soon, Alex discovered that their Substack, Gmail, Discord, and cryptocurrency wallets suffered the same fate and were controlled by the hackers.</p> <p>While this is not a new stratagem, threat actors appear to use it more often. In October last year, BleepingComputer reported on a massive campaign that relied on more than 200 typosquatting domains for over two dozen brands to mislead users.</p> <p>The distribution method was unknown at the time but separate reports in December from cybersecurity companies Trend Micro and Guardio revealed that hackers were abusing the Google Ads platform to push malicious downloads in search results.</p> <p>Flurry of malicious ads in Google search results</p>

Following NFT God's thread, BleepingComputer conducted its own research and uncovered that OBS is one in a long list of software that threat actors impersonate to push malicious downloads in Google Ads search results.

One example we found is a Google Ad search result for Rufus, a free utility for creating bootable USB flash drives.

The threat actor registered domains that resemble the official one and copied the main part of the legitimate site up to the download section.

In one case, they used the generic top-level domain "pro," likely in an attempt to pique victim interest and attract with the promise of a wider set of program features.

To note, there is no advanced variant of Rufus. There is only one edition available as an installable or portable variant [hosted on GitHub](#).

For the malicious version, the download goes to a file transfer service. Because it is an archive bomb, many antivirus engines [do not detect it as a threat](#).

Another popular program impersonated is the text and source code editor Notepad++. The threat actor used typosquatting to create a domain similar to the legitimate one from the official developer.

Security researcher Will Dormann found that fake Notepad++ downloads in the sponsored section of Google search were available from additional URLs, all files being marked as malicious by various antivirus (AV) engines on the Virus Total scanning platform.

BleepingComputer also found a website filled with fake software downloads distributed solely via Google Ads search results. The website impersonates what appears to be a legitimate web design company in India called Zensoft Tech.

Unfortunately, we could not verify if the downloads were malicious but given that the domain is a typosquatted URL, the site blocks search engines from indexing content and promoting the downloads only through ads in search results, there is a strong indication of malicious activity.

Among the pieces of software we discovered on the website are the file compression utilities 7-ZIP and WinRAR, and the widely used media player VLC.

From a different domain, threat actors provided a malicious version of the CCleaner utility for removing potentially unwanted files and invalid Windows Registry entries.

It appears that the hackers made an effort to outbid the legitimate developer and thus have their ad in the top position. As seen in the image below, the official CCleaner website is displayed under the malicious advertisement. This site offered a CCleaner.zip file that installed Redline information-stealing malware.

Several security researchers ([mdmck10](#), [MalwareHunterTeam](#), [Will Dormann](#), [Germán Fernández](#)) have uncovered additional URLs hosting malicious downloads impersonating free and open-source software, confirming that luring users through sponsored results on Google search is a more common approach for cybercriminals.

Germán Fernández of cybersecurity company CronUp provides a [list of 70 domains](#) that are distributing malware through Google Ads search results by impersonating legitimate software.

The websites are replicas of the official ones and either provide fake software or redirect to another download location. Many of them offer Audacity and some are for VLC and the image editor GIMP.

One user almost fell for the trick when looking to get the Blender 3D open-source 3D creation suite. A [tweet from MalwareHunterTeam](#) shows that three malicious ads for this product preceded the link from the official developer.

Looking at one of the samples flagged as malicious by some AV products, security researcher Will Dormann noticed that it had an [invalid signature](#) from cybersecurity company Bitdefender.

Although BleepingComputer could not check in all cases the malware delivered this way, in some instances the payload was the RedLine Stealer we saw in the fake CCleaner site.

This malware collects sensitive data from browsers (credentials, credit card, autocomplete info), details about the system (username, location, hardware, security software available), and cryptocurrency.

Fernández found that one threat actor distributed the .NET-based remote access trojan SectoRAT, also known as Arechclient2, via fake downloads for the Audacity digital audio editor.

The researcher also came across the Vidar info-stealer delivered via malicious downloads for Blender 3D advertised in Google Search. Vidar is focused on collecting sensitive info from browsers and can also steal cryptocurrency wallets.

BleepingComputer has shared some of these findings with Google and a company representative told us that the platform's policies are designed and enforced to prevent brand impersonation.

"We have robust policies prohibiting ads that attempt to [circumvent our enforcement](#) by disguising the advertiser's identity and impersonating other brands, and we enforce them vigorously. We reviewed the ads in question and have removed them" – Google

Google said it will check if additional advertisements and sites reported violate their policies and will take appropriate action if needed.

Ad-blockers could increase protection

Using sponsored ads in search results as a malware delivery channel has been flagged by the FBI in an [alert](#) last year before Christmas.

The agency warned that "these advertisements appear at the very top of search results with minimum distinction between an advertisement and an actual search result" and they link to a website that "looks identical to the impersonated business's official webpage."

Because of this, cybercriminals have a better chance of spreading their malware to a larger pool of unsuspecting users.

Checking the URL of a download source is always good advice. Coupled with the use of an ad-blocker, the level of protection against this type of threat should decrease drastically.

Ad-blockers are available as extensions in most web browsers and, as their name says, they stop advertisements from being loaded and displayed on a web page, including search results.

Apart from adding to more comfortable use of the internet, ad-blockers also step up privacy by preventing tracking cookies in advertisements from collecting data about your browsing habits.

In this case, however, such extensions could make the difference between losing access to your sensitive information or online accounts and getting digital resources from legitimate vendors.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/18 Free BianLian ransomware decryptor
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/avast-releases-free-bianlian-ransomware-decryptor/

Security software company Avast has released a free decryptor for the BianLian ransomware strain to help victims of the malware recover locked files without paying the hackers.

The availability of a decryptor comes only about half a year after increased activity from BianLian ransomware over the summer of 2022, when the threat group breached multiple high-profile organizations.

Avast's decryption tool can only help victims attacked by a known variant of the BianLian ransomware.

If the hackers are using a new version of the malware that researchers have yet to catch, the tool is of no help at the moment.

However, [Avast says](#) the BianLian decryptor is a work in progress, and the ability to unlock more strains will be added shortly.

BianLian ransomware

[BianLian](#) (not to be confused with the [same-name Android banking trojan](#)) is a Go-based ransomware strain targeting Windows systems.

It uses the symmetric AES-256 algorithm with the CBC cipher mode to encrypt over 1013 file extensions on all accessible drives.

The malware performs [intermittent encryption](#) on the victim's files, a tactic that helps speed up the attacks at the expense of data locking strength.

Encrypted files get the ".bianlian" extension, while the generated ransom note warns victims that they have ten days to meet the hacker's demands or their private data will be published on the gang's data leak site.

For more details on the operation of BianLian ransomware, check out this [SecurityScoreCard report](#) on the strain published in December 2022.

Avast's decryptor

The BianLian ransomware decryptor is available for free and the program is a standalone executable that doesn't require installation.

Users can select the location they wish to decrypt and provide the software with a pair of original/encrypted files.

There's also an option for users with a valid decryption password, but if the victim doesn't have one, the software can still attempt to figure it out by iterating through all known BianLian passwords.

The decryptor also offers an option to backup encrypted files to prevent irreversible loss of data if something goes wrong during the process.

Those attacked by newer versions of the BianLian ransomware will have to locate the ransomware binary on the hard drive, which might contain data that can be used for deciphering the locked files.

Avast says some common filenames and locations for BianLian are:

- C:\Windows\TEMP\mativ.exe
- C:\Windows\Temp\Areg.exe
- C:\Users\%username%\Pictures\windows.exe
- anabolic.exe

However, because the malware deletes itself after the file encryption phase, it is unlikely that victims will find those binaries on their systems.

	Those who manage to retrieve BinaLian binaries are requested to send them to "decryptors@avast.com" to help Avast improve its decrypter.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Nissan North America data breach
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/nissan-north-america-data-breach-caused-by-vendor-exposed-database/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Nissan North America has begun sending data breach notifications informing customers of a breach at a third-party service provider that exposed customer information.</p> <p>The security incident was reported to the Office of the Maine Attorney General on Monday, January 16, 2023, where Nissan disclosed that 17,998 customers were affected by the breach.</p> <p>In the notification sample, Nissan claims it received notice of a data breach from one of its software development vendors on June 21, 2022.</p> <p>The third party had received customer data from Nissan to use in developing and testing software solutions for the automaker, which was inadvertently exposed due to a poorly configured database.</p> <p>Upon learning of the security incident, Nissan ensured the exposed database had been secured and launched an internal investigation. On September 26, 2022, it verified that an unauthorized person had likely accessed the data.</p> <p>"During our investigation, on September 26, 2022, we determined that this incident likely resulted in the unauthorized access or acquisition of our data, including some personal information belonging to Nissan customers," reads the notice.</p> <p>"Specifically, the data embedded within the code during software testing was unintentionally and temporarily stored in a cloud-based public repository."</p> <p>The exposed data includes full names, dates of birth, and NMAC account numbers (Nissan finance account). In addition, the notice clarifies that the exposed information did not include credit card details or Social Security numbers.</p> <p>Nissan says that to this date, it has seen no evidence that any of this information has been misused and is sending out the notices out of an abundance of caution.</p> <p>Additionally, all recipients of the breach notices will be offered a one-year membership of identity protection services through Experian.</p> <p>Past problems</p> <p>In January 2021, Nissan North America experienced a similar incident, leaving a Git server exposed online with default access credentials, resulting in several repositories of the firm becoming public.</p> <p>This incident led to the leak of 20 GB of data, including mobile apps and internal tools source code, market research and client acquisition data, diagnostics, and NissanConnect services details.</p> <p>More recently, in October 2022, Toyota experienced a similar data security incident in which the personal information of 296,019 customers was exposed.</p> <p>The incident occurred because a GitHub repository containing access keys to the company's databases was left open to public access for five years.</p> <p>Also, Nissan, and other car companies, were shown to follow poor API security practices on their mobile apps and online portals, potentially leading to account takeovers and sensitive information exposure.</p>

HEADLINE	01/18 CISA publishes 4 ICS advisories
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/cisa-warns-of-flaws-in-siemens-ge.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has published four Industrial Control Systems (ICS) advisories, calling out several security flaws affecting products from Siemens, GE Digital, and Contec.</p> <p>The most critical of the issues have been identified in Siemens SINEC INS that could lead to remote code execution via a path traversal flaw (CVE-2022-45092, CVSS score: 9.9) and command injection (CVE-2022-2068, CVSS score: 9.8).</p> <p>Also patched by Siemens is an authentication bypass vulnerability in llhttp parser (CVE-2022-35256, CVSS score: 9.8) as well as an out-of-bounds write bug in the OpenSSL library (CVE-2022-2274, CVSS score: 9.8) that could be exploited to trigger remote code execution.</p> <p>The German automation company, in December 2022, released Service Pack 2 Update 1 software to mitigate the flaws.</p> <p>Separately, a critical flaw has also been revealed in GE Digital's Proficy Historian solution that could result in code execution regardless of authentication status. The issue, tracked as CVE-2022-46732 (CVSS score: 9.8), impacts Proficy Historian versions 7.0 and higher, and has been remediated in Proficy Historian 2023.</p> <p>"An attacker can take advantage of this fact and bypass the historian authentication by impersonating a local service," Uri Katz, security researcher at industrial security firm Claroty, said. "This allows remote attackers the ability to log in to any GE Proficy Historian server and force it to perform unauthorized actions."</p> <p>CISA also updated an ICS advisory that was published last month, detailing a critical command injection vulnerability in Contec CONPROSYS HMI System (CVE-2022-44456, CVSS score: 10.0) that could permit a remote attacker to send specially crafted requests to execute arbitrary commands.</p> <p>While this shortcoming was patched by Contec in version 3.4.5, the software has since been found to be vulnerable to four additional defects that could lead to information disclosure and unauthorized access.</p> <p>Users of CONPROSYS HMI System are recommended to update to version 3.5.0 or later, in addition to taking steps to minimize network exposure and isolate such devices from business networks.</p> <p>The advisories come less than a week after CISA released 12 such alerts warning of critical flaws impacting software from Sewio, InHand Networks, Sauter Controls, and Siemens.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Ukraine wants access to ChatGPT
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/g5v7j7/ukraine-wants-access-to-chatgpt
GIST	<p>The vice prime minister of Ukraine wants access to ChatGPT, the machine learning-powered chatbot from OpenAI that can generate advanced writing based on different prompts that a user enters, from fairytales to speeches.</p> <p>On Friday, Mykhailo Fedorov tweeted, "Would like to appeal to ChatGPT team, @OpenAI to open your software for Ukraine. We are excited how develops AI tools. Ukrainians are tech-savy, cool & ready to test innovations now. Personally me will use your tool to make my twitter account great again. Sounds like a deal?"</p>

In addition to Ukraine, ChatGPT is currently unavailable in China, Russia, Afghanistan, Belarus, Venezuela, and Iran, [according to a Ukrainian blog called Mezha Media. On OpenAI's list of supported countries](#), none of the aforementioned countries are mentioned. Though OpenAI has never explicitly stated its reasoning behind these bans, it is likely a response to regions currently in conflict or under sanctions.

“While we would like to make our technology available everywhere, conditions in certain countries make it difficult or impossible for us to do so in a way that is consistent with our mission. We are currently working to increase the number of locations where we can provide safe and beneficial access to our tools,” a spokesperson from OpenAI told Motherboard.

People online have been trying to get a response from OpenAI in regard to this geo-block. [A user on OpenAI's forum](#) using the username “boldfrontiers” said that the keyword “Ukraine” was also banned last August on the platform’s text-to-image tool, DALL-E: “I got a warning recently after using the word Ukraine in a text prompt. Kind of understand why as the country is associated with war these days, but my intention was to render a portrait of a Ukrainian person which has nothing to do with the war. This after using country names like America / United States, Canada, France, England, Wales, Italy, etc. with absolutely no issues.”

The ban on Ukraine-related prompts was [eventually lifted](#). The same user later said they received an email from a Ukrainian person, [who asked them to raise awareness](#) of the fact that Ukrainian users can't access the platform altogether. Boldfrontiers pointed out that blocking Ukraine from Dall-E access contradicts [OpenAI investor](#) Microsoft’s support for Ukraine, as it announced in November that it would extend all technology support [free of charge for Ukraine throughout 2023](#).

After ChatGPT launched its chatbot using the GPT-3 model in December, it quickly grew in popularity, with Open AI founder Sam Altman tweeting, “there is a lot more demand for ChatGPT than we expected; we are working to add more capacity.” The chatbot has since been used for a number of purposes, from [negotiating down internet bills](#) to being integrated as [part of Microsoft's Bing](#) search engine.

Despite [Altman's warning](#) that ChatGPT is limited and cannot be relied on for anything important, many people are nevertheless excited about the bot’s potential, leading OpenAI to develop a monetized version [that began piloting](#) this week.

Many Ukrainian citizens have echoed Fedorov’s appeal to OpenAI to gain access to ChatGPT.

The [Editor-in-Chief of Mezha Media wrote](#), “Unfortunately, users and developers from Ukraine cannot test the possibilities of ChatGPT because, for unknown reasons, OpenAI closed Ukrainians’ access to the GPT-3 API, on which the new chatbot works. The organization placed Ukraine on the same list as terrorist countries such as russia and Iran. We hope that this will gain wide publicity and OpenAI will change its position regarding users from Ukraine.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Jan 6 committee probe about social media
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/01/17/jan6-committee-report-social-media/
GIST	<p>The Jan. 6 committee spent months gathering stunning new details on how social media companies failed to address the online extremism and calls for violence that preceded the Capitol riot.</p> <p>The evidence they collected was written up in a 122-page memo that was circulated among the committee, according to a draft viewed by The Washington Post. But in the end, committee leaders declined to delve into those topics in detail in their final report, reluctant to dig into the roots of domestic extremism taking hold in the Republican Party beyond former president Donald Trump and concerned about the risks of a public battle with powerful tech companies, according to three people familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the panel’s sensitive deliberations.</p>

Congressional investigators found evidence that tech platforms — especially Twitter — failed to heed their own employees’ warnings about violent rhetoric on their platforms and bent their rules to avoid penalizing conservatives, particularly then-president Trump, out of fear of reprisals. The draft report details how most platforms did not take “dramatic” steps to rein in extremist content until after the attack on the Capitol, despite clear red flags across the internet.

“The sum of this is that alt-tech, fringe, and mainstream platforms were exploited in tandem by right-wing activists to bring American democracy to the brink of ruin,” the staffers wrote in their memo. “These platforms enabled the mobilization of extremists on smaller sites and whipped up conservative grievance on larger, more mainstream ones.”

But little of the evidence supporting those findings surfaced during the public phase of the committee’s probe, including its 845-page report that focused almost exclusively on Trump’s actions that day and in the weeks just before.

That focus on Trump meant the report missed an opportunity to hold social media companies accountable for their actions, or lack thereof, even though the platforms had been the subject of intense scrutiny since Trump’s first presidential campaign in 2016, the people familiar with the matter said.

Confronting that evidence would have forced the committee to examine how conservative commentators helped amplify the Trump messaging that ultimately contributed to the Capitol attack, the people said — a course that some committee members considered both politically risky and inviting opposition from some of the world’s most powerful tech companies, two of the people said.

“Given the amount of material they actually ultimately got from the big social media companies, I think it is unfortunate that we didn’t get a better picture of how ‘Stop the Steal’ was organized online, how the materials spread,” said Heidi Beirich, co-founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism nonprofit. “They could have done that for us.”

The Washington Post has previously reported that Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.), the committee’s co-chair, drove efforts to keep the report focused on Trump. But interviews since the report’s release indicate that Rep. Zoe Lofgren, a Democrat whose Northern California district includes Silicon Valley, also resisted efforts to bring more focus in the report onto social media companies.

Lofgren denied that she opposed including a social media appendix in the report or more detail about what investigators learned in interviews with tech company employees.

“I spent substantial time editing the proposed report so it was directly cited to our evidence, instead of news articles and opinion pieces,” Lofgren said. “In the end, the social media findings were included into other parts of the report and appendixes, a decision made by the Chairman in consultation with the Committee.”

Committee Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-Miss.) did not respond to a request for comment. Thompson previously had said that the committee would examine what steps tech companies took to prevent their platforms from “being breeding grounds to radicalizing people to violence.” Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-Md.), who sat in on some of the depositions of tech employees, did not comment.

Inside Facebook, Jan. 6 violence fueled anger, regret over missed warning signs

Understanding the role social media played in the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol takes on greater significance as tech platforms undo some of the measures they adopted to prevent political misinformation on their platforms. Under new owner Elon Musk, Twitter has laid off most of the team that reviewed tweets for abusive and inaccurate content and restored several prominent accounts that the company banned in the fallout from the Capitol attack, including Trump’s and that of his first national security adviser, Michael Flynn. Facebook, too, is considering allowing Trump back on its platform, a decision expected as early as next week.

“Recent events demonstrate that nothing about America’s stormy political climate or the role of social media within it has fundamentally changed since January 6th,” the staffers’ draft memo warned.

Social media moderation also has become a flash point in the states. Both Texas and Florida passed laws in the wake of Trump’s suspension to restrict what content social media platforms can remove from their sites, while California has imposed legislation requiring companies to disclose their content moderation policies.

But the Jan. 6 committee report offered only a vague recommendation about social media regulation, writing that congressional committees “should continue to evaluate policies of media companies that have had the effect of radicalizing their consumers.”

Did Twitter give Trump a pass?

Some of what investigators uncovered in their interviews with employees of the platforms contradicts Republican claims that tech companies displayed a liberal bias in their moderation decisions — an allegation that has gained new attention recently as Musk has promoted a series of leaked internal communications known as the “Twitter Files.” The transcripts indicate the reverse, with former Twitter employees describing how the company gave Trump special treatment.

Twitter employees, they testified, could not even view the former president’s tweets in one of their key content moderation tools, and they ultimately had to create a Google document to keep track of his tweets as calls grew to suspend his account.

“... Twitter was terrified of the backlash they would get if they followed their own rules and applied them to Donald Trump,” said one former employee, who testified to the committee under the pseudonym J. Johnson.

The committee staffers who focused on social media and extremism — known within the committee as “Team Purple” — spent more than a year sifting through tens of thousands of documents from multiple companies, interviewing social media company executives and former staffers, and analyzing thousands of posts. They sent a flurry of subpoenas and requests for information to social media companies ranging from Facebook to fringe social networks including Gab and the chat platform Discord.

Yet as the investigation continued, the role of social media took a back seat, despite Chairman Thompson’s earlier assertion that how misinformation spread and what steps social media companies took to prevent it were “two key questions for the Select Committee.”

Committee staffers drafted more subpoenas for social media executives, including former Twitter executive Del Harvey, who was described in testimony as key to Twitter’s decisions regarding Trump and violent rhetoric. But Cheney never signed off on the subpoenas, two of the people said, and they were never sent. Harvey did not testify. At one point, committee staffers discussed having a public hearing focused on the role of social media during the election, but none was scheduled, the people said.

The long debate about social media

The role of social media has been a central topic of American politics since the 2016 presidential campaign, when hackers accessed emails from Democratic Party servers and leaked the contents onto the internet, and Russian trolls posing as Americans posted misinformation on both Twitter and Facebook, without detection. Concern about the impact of social media grew in the aftermath of the 2020 election, with Facebook and Twitter suspending hundreds of accounts for spreading false information about the result as well as baseless conspiracy theories about balloting irregularities.

In the days before Jan. 6, 2021, media reports documented Trump’s call on Twitter for people to rally in Washington — it’ll be wild, he tweeted — and there was growing talk of guns and potential violence on sites such as Telegram, Parler and TheDonald.win.

The Purple Team's memo detailed how the actions of roughly 15 social networks played a significant role in the attack. It described how major platforms like Facebook and Twitter, prominent video streaming sites like YouTube and Twitch and smaller fringe networks like Parler, Gab and 4chan served as megaphones for those seeking to stoke division or organize the insurrection. It detailed how some platforms bent their rules to avoid penalizing conservatives out of fear of reprisals, while others were reluctant to curb the "Stop the Steal" movement after the attack.

But as the committee's probe kicked its public phase into high gear, the social media report was repeatedly pared down, eventually to just a handful of pages. While the memo and the evidence it cited informed other parts of the committee's work, including its public hearings and depositions, it ultimately was not included as a stand-alone chapter or as one of the four appendixes.

In the weeks since the report was released, however, some of that evidence has trickled out as the committee released hundreds of pages of transcripts of interviews with former tech employees and dozens of documents. The transcripts show the companies used relatively primitive technologies and amateurish techniques to watch for dangers and enforce their platforms' rules. They also show company officials quibbling among themselves over how to apply the rules to possible incitements to violence, even as the riot turned violent.

The transcript of Anika Collier Navaroli, one of the longest-tenured members of Twitter's safety policy team, describes in detail how the company's systems were outmatched as the pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol.

When the #ExecuteMikePence hashtag started trending on Twitter on Jan. 6, 2021, Collier Navaroli was sitting in her New York apartment, scrolling through thousands of death threats and other hateful messages and trying to remove them one by one.

Her main way of finding tweets calling for Vice President Mike Pence's execution was by pasting the hashtag into the Twitter website's search box, manually copying each tweet's details into an internal flagging tool, and then returning to the timeline as more tweets poured in.

"I was doing that for ... hours," she testified, saying only a few other people that day were doing the same work. "We didn't stand a chance."

Collier Navaroli also faulted top executives, including Twitter's Harvey, for blocking potential rule changes that would have allowed company moderators to take a more proactive stance to reduce calls for violence. At one point, Collier Navaroli said she pushed the company to enact a policy that would have restricted tweets using hashtags like #LockedandLoaded, which moderators had seen being used by people boasting they were armed and ready to march on the Capitol. Harvey, Collier Navaroli said, had pushed back, arguing that the phrase could be used by people tweeting about self-defense and should be allowed.

Harvey, who is no longer with Twitter and advertises herself as a public speaker, did not respond to requests for comment sent to her email or LinkedIn.

The Purple Team's draft outlines how extremism and violent rhetoric jumped from platform to platform in the lead-up to Jan 6. In the hours after Trump's tweet about how Jan. 6 would be wild, the chat service Discord had to shut down a server because Trump's supporters were using it to plan how they could bring firearms into Washington, according to the memo.

The investigators also wrote that much of the content that was shared on Twitter, Facebook and other sites came from Google-owned YouTube, which did not ban election fraud claims until Dec. 9 and did not apply its policy retroactively. The investigators found that its lax policies and enforcement made it "a repository for false claims of election fraud." Even when these videos weren't recommended by YouTube's own algorithms, they were shared across other parts of the internet.

"YouTube's policies relevant to election integrity were inadequate to the moment," the staffers wrote.

The draft report also says that smaller platforms were not reactive enough to the threat posed by Trump. The report singled out Reddit for being slow to take down a pro-Trump forum called “r/The-Donald.” The moderators of that forum used it to “freely advertise” TheDonald.win, which hosted violent content in the lead-up to Jan. 6.

Facebook parent company Meta declined to comment. Twitter, which has laid off the majority of its communications staff, did not respond to a request for comment.

YouTube spokeswoman Ivy Choi said the company has long-established policies against incitement, and that the company began enforcing its election integrity rules once “enough states certified election results.”

“As a direct result of these policies, even before January 6 we terminated thousands of channels, several of which were associated with figures related to the attack, and removed thousands of violative videos, the majority before 100 views,” she said in a statement.

Reddit spokeswoman Cameron Njaa said the company’s policies prohibit content that “glorifies, incites or calls for violence against groups of people or individuals.” She said that the company “found no evidence of coordinated calls for violence” related to Jan. 6 on its platform.

Discord “strongly condemns the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6th” and is committed to “combating violence and extremism of any kind,” said Rachel Beckerman, the company’s director of global policy communications.

Former Facebook employees who testified to the committee reported their company also resisted imposing restrictions. Brian Fishman, the company’s former head of dangerous organizations, testified that the company had been slow to react to efforts to delegitimize the 2020 election results.

“I thought Facebook should be more aggressive in taking down ‘Stop the Steal’ stuff before January 6th,” Fishman said. He noted, however, that broader action would have resulted in taking down “much of the conservative movement on the platform, far beyond just groups that said ‘Stop the Steal,’ mainstream conservative commentators.”

He said he did not believe such action “would have prevented violence on January 6th.”

The committee also spoke to Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen, whose leaked documents in 2021 showed that the country’s largest social media platform largely had disbanded its election integrity efforts ahead of the Jan. 6 riot. But little of her account made it into the final document.

“It’s sad that they didn’t include the intentional choices that Facebook made,” she said in an interview. “At the same time, you’re asking them to do a lot of different things in a single report.”

Deference to Trump

A large part of Twitter’s failure to act, multiple former Twitter employees, including Johnson and Collier Navaroli, told the committee, was deference to Trump.

Trump’s account was the only one of Twitter’s hundreds of millions that rank-and-file officials could not review in one of their main internal tools, Profile Viewer, which allowed moderators to establish a history and share notes about an account’s past tweets and behaviors, the employees testified.

The block prevented moderators from reviewing how others had assessed Trump’s tweets, even as his following grew to 88 million and his tweets drove conversations around the world. Trump “was a unique user who sat above and beyond the rules of Twitter,” Collier Navaroli testified.

	<p>“There was this underlying understanding we’re not reaching out to the President,” she told the committee. “We’re not reaching out to Donald Trump. There is no point in doing education here because this is how this individual is. So the resolution was to do nothing.”</p> <p>Collier Navaroli and a few others inside the company had worked to push executives to action long before Jan. 6, she said, citing internal memos and messages. In the week after the November 2020 election, she said, they began warning that tweets calling for civil unrest were multiplying. By Dec. 19, she said, Twitter staff had begun warning that discussions of civil unrest had centralized on Jan. 6 — the day that Trump had called his supporters to mass in Washington, saying it “will be wild!”</p> <p>By Dec. 29, she and members of other Twitter teams had begun warning that Twitter lacked a coordinated response plan, and on Jan. 5, she said, she warned a supervisor directly that the company would need a much more robust response the following day.</p> <p>When asked by a committee staffer whether Twitter had adopted a “war footing,” having seen the warnings, Collier Navaroli said her U.S. team had fewer than six people, and that “everybody was acting as if it was a regular day and nothing was going on.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 University of Texas at Austin bans TikTok
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/01/18/ut-austin-bans-tiktok-greg-abbott/
GIST	<p>The University of Texas at Austin, a sprawling campus with more than 52,000 students, said it has blocked the social media app TikTok from its networks and is in the process of removing the app from university-issued devices because of digital security concerns.</p> <p>Jeff Neyland, adviser to the university’s president for technology strategy, said in an email to students Tuesday that the university was taking the steps to comply with Texas Gov. Greg Abbott’s directive last month banning the use of TikTok, which is owned by Chinese tech giant ByteDance, on any government-issued devices.</p> <p>“The university is taking these important steps to eliminate risks to information contained in the university’s network and to our critical infrastructure,” Neyland wrote. He added, “TikTok harvests vast amounts of data from its users’ devices ... and offers this trove of potentially sensitive information to the Chinese government.”</p> <p>The University of Texas at Austin is one of several campuses across the country that have restricted TikTok use; in late December, the app was also banned from all devices managed by the U.S. House of Representatives, and several states have additionally banned it from government-issued devices.</p> <p>TikTok has repeatedly asserted that it does not share information with the Chinese government and that it does not store the data of American users in China, but U.S. lawmakers and cybersecurity experts have widely remained skeptical, fearing that Beijing could compel the company to share data.</p> <p>“There are legitimate reasons to be concerned about data privacy and TikTok. It’s not paranoia,” said Karen North, a professor of digital and social media at the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. It’s unclear what data TikTok is accessing on any users’ device, where it’s storing that data and who it’s being shared with, she said.</p> <p>“The problem is that part of this is speculation, and part of it is a recognized pattern of data collection from a company that resides in a country where data collection is the norm rather than a sanctioned activity,” she added. “Pretty much everybody believes that TikTok is collecting data, all the time.”</p> <p>Universities have troves of sensitive information to protect, including medical records, academic records and disciplinary reports. The ban prevents users from using TikTok while connected to university networks, but students and faculty can still access the app on their own personal WiFi or by using cellular data on personal devices.</p>

“They’re not saying you can’t use TikTok on campus. They’re saying you cannot use TikTok while logged into our WiFi,” North said.

Kate Biberdorf, a chemistry professor at the University of Texas at Austin who has garnered more than 2.6 million followers sharing science experiments on TikTok, said that she’s against the ban and that she has still been able to access the app using campus WiFi.

“Our rights are slowly being chipped away in Texas, and this recent ban feels like another push in the wrong direction,” she said in an email.

“My students are hilarious, and they are just going to use their data to post TikToks,” she added. “You can’t stop Gen Z!”

[Return to Top](#)

Terrorism, Extremism

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	01/18 Taliban fear ISKP threats from Pakistan
SOURCE	https://www.firstpost.com/world/afghanistan-afghan-taliban-fears-isis-threat-from-pakistan-12006212.html
GIST	<p>Kabul: Since it was formed after the partition of India in 1947, Pakistan has used its territory for fuelling cross-border terrorism against its eastern neighbour.</p> <p>Since then, Pakistan has supported terrorist groups in other neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan and Iran.</p> <p>Now, even the Afghan Taliban, which was until recently backed by the Pakistan Army, has started complaining about terrorism emanating from Pakistani soil.</p> <p>According to an ANI report, for the first time, the Taliban reported threats from Pakistan, which they considered as the safe haven from 2000-2021, independent journalist Bilal Sarwary said citing an internal memo.</p> <p>Taking to Twitter, Sarwary said, “A leaked Taliban internal memo reports an ISKP training camp inside Pak’s tribal area&warns of ISKP massing from Pak into Logar. This is an interesting twist in the story with first-time Taliban reports of threats from Pakistan where they once had their safe havens from 2002-2021.”</p> <p>Taliban and Pakistan’s relationship are now on an edgy path. On one part Taliban felt threatened by Pakistan while on the other side, Islamabad faced severe repercussions for supporting the group.</p> <p>Pakistan, which has always been involved in state sponsorship of cross-border terrorism since its inception and even praised the Afghan Taliban in the past but now facing its repercussions, the South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF) has reported.</p> <p>However, now it is facing two-sided attacks from Afghan Taliban and Pakistani Taliban which is supported by its ideological brother from Afghanistan, according to the recent SADF report.</p> <p>When the Taliban captured Afghanistan in August 2021, then Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan praised the Afghan Taliban by saying it broke the “shackles of slavery,” it said.</p> <p>It must be noted here that December 2022 proved to be the worst month for the country, said SADF, a Brussels-based think tank devoted to South Asia and its relationship with the European Union (EU).</p>

Since the takeover of the Taliban in Kabul, Pakistan saw a 50 per cent rise in terror attacks and most of which were by Pakistani Taliban (TTP) with the support of the Afghan Taliban. Even the peace talks between TTP and the Pakistan regime were revoked, it said.

The report further said that, in the last two decades, Pakistan had the opportunity to stop using Jihadism as a foreign policy tool and end the use of extreme Islamist factions as an influence. This could have improved its relations with India.

Pakistan could have improved on unhealthy civil-military relations, the protection of ethnic minorities and sustainable economic development. Instead, the leaders decided to maintain their support for the Taliban against both the US and its NATO allies, the SADF said.

According to the SADF Director of Research Siegfried O Wolf, the terrorism Pakistan is facing today is not the result of the Imran Khan government but is the result of “multiple lost opportunities and policy blunders by both military and civilian leadership since 1947.”

“Pakistan’s approach towards the Afghan Taliban failed since Islamabad’s objectives in Afghanistan were not attained – much the opposite, we now witness the destabilization of Pakistan itself,” it said.

In addition to this, Pakistan had no comprehensive Afghanistan policy because of which it was assuming that the Taliban they are helping will remain grateful to them forever.

The same report by Wolf further claimed that there was a perception among Pakistani security circles that the ties, especially the military alliance between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan Taliban ‘would gradually weaken’ and that the new rulers in Kabul would take concrete action against the TTP and other anti-Pakistan elements on Afghan soil.

“This is astonishing since Islamabad had a previous experience that the former Taliban regime (1996-2001) also did not respond positively to Pakistani demands, foremost the recognition of the Durand Line as an international border and the hoped-for decisive measures against anti-Pakistani groups residing on Afghan soil,” the SADF concluded.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Govt surveillance power faces questions
SOURCE	https://www.axios.com/2023/01/17/fisa-government-surveillance-cia-fbi-section-702
GIST	<p>Prepare to hear a lot of debate throughout Washington about whether a secretive government surveillance power should continue to exist beyond 2023.</p> <p>The big picture: Congress is faced with deciding whether to reauthorize Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act — which allows intelligence agencies to conduct warrantless surveillance of non-American citizens outside the U.S. — before it expires at the end of the year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• But with a divided Congress and growing Republican scrutiny of intelligence agencies, the federal government's path to reauthorization will face several hurdles. <p>How it works: Little is known about the true extent of 702's use within the intelligence community, but at a bare minimum, it allows agencies like the CIA, the NSA and the FBI to spy on people abroad through backdoors in telecommunications networks and other online communications systems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gen. Paul Nakasone, head of the NSA and the U.S. Cyber Command, said during an event last week that 702 powers have helped the U.S. government stop planned terrorist plots and cyber espionage campaigns before they happen.• However, unlike other FISA provisions, 702 doesn't require a target to be a suspected terrorist, spy or other foreign agent. And often, conversations with U.S. citizens get lumped into 702 data collection. <p>State of play: FISA debates have long leant themselves to strange bedfellows.</p>

- The intelligence community and a key group of moderate Democrats are likely to support the continued existence of these intelligence powers.
- Meanwhile, progressive Democrats, conservative Republicans, and civil rights and privacy groups will push back on what they each view as an unchecked overreach of government power.

What they're saying: "702 provides a critically important capability to the intelligence community as we face rising challenges from China and Russia, as well as threats from terrorism, cyber actors, and others," Senate Intelligence Chair Mark Warner (D-Va.) tells Axios in a statement.

Between the lines: The lack of public disclosures about how 702 is used behind closed doors will be a huge theme in the debate.

- Advocates are likely to push to learn more about the full extent of how government agencies use communications collected through the 702 program since the information is stored in a database and remains accessible to several agencies for years at a time.
- But intelligence agencies often cannot share their work so they don't compromise ongoing investigations — making it difficult to publicly explain why the broad surveillance power is needed.

The intrigue: With a strong, vocal conservative faction in the House, legislative reforms to the 702 program are more likely.

- Conservatives, progressives and advocates are expected to [push for several reforms](#), like limiting the scope of who can be investigated, requiring a warrant for surveillance, and restricting how long collected information is stored.

Flashback: Debates about FISA reauthorizations have always been tedious and filled with tension on Capitol Hill.

- In March 2020, lawmakers allowed [Section 215 and two other surveillance authorities to expire](#) after failing to come to an agreement on broader changes to FISA.

What's next: The Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, an independent government body, will release a report this spring with recommendations for Congress and the intelligence community for adding privacy safeguards into the surveillance program.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Iran planning WMD attacks in Europe?
SOURCE	https://www.thetrumpet.com/26841-is-iran-planning-wmd-attacks-in-europe
GIST	<p>Two potential terror plots with links to Iran were foiled in Europe in recent weeks. The first to be announced came from Germany, where police arrested two Iranian brothers, ages 32 and 25, on January 8. They were suspected of plotting to carry out a biological terrorist attack.</p> <p>The arrest followed a tip from a foreign agency—German media says it was the Federal Bureau of Investigation—saying one of the men had toxins, including cyanide and ricin, and was planning to carry out a terrorist attack. A decontamination unit and a detonation unit were on hand for the arrest.</p> <p>Apparently, the men had planned to launch an attack on New Year's Eve but didn't manage to get all their kit together in time.</p> <p>Both ricin and cyanide can cause death, even in small quantities, and ricin has no antidote.</p> <p>Peter Neumann of King's College London told Germany's Die Zeit that it's concerning that Germany seems unable to stop these attacks on its own. This is the latest of several that have been thwarted only because of tips from the United States.</p> <p>Around the same time, news emerged of an Iranian business caught smuggling uranium into the United Kingdom.</p>

The UK launched a major counterterrorism operation after Heathrow Airport authorities discovered a package containing several kilograms of nuclear material on December 29. It was addressed to an Iran-linked firm on British soil.

The uranium was mixed in with scrap metal that had traveled to the UK from Pakistan via Oman. It was addressed to an Iranian business. Counterterrorism police later arrested one man under section 9 of the Terrorism Act 2006—meaning he is accused “of making or possessing a radioactive device or possessing radioactive material with the intention of using it.”

Retired Col. Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, former commander of UK and nato Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Forces, told the Telegraph: “The fact it was destined for an Iranian company really does raise the specter of was this a sample?” He continued:

Iran supports global terror. I wouldn't be at all surprised if they have their fingerprints all over this.

Why would you ship scrap metal on an aeroplane? Imagine the cost; it would be phenomenal.

There is no good reason to put uranium in the post, but there are a lot of bad reasons.

The uranium was not in any condition to make a nuclear bomb. Fears centered around a “dirty bomb”—a conventional explosive that spreads radioactive particles.

There are much more deadly ingredients that could be used in a dirty bomb than the uranium discovered, leading some to believe it may be a case of accidental contamination. But the Iranian connection to two possible radiological and biological plots are worth paying attention to.

Iranian efforts to carry out attacks in the UK and Europe have accelerated in recent years. This marks a shift in Iran's relationship with Germany.

Germany has long tolerated an Iranian presence within the nation—and has even cultivated it. In 2018, the Jerusalem Post wrote: “Germany is widely considered a stronghold of Iranian espionage, including regime efforts to obtain missiles and nuclear goods. Tehran made nearly 40 attempts in 2016 to purchase missile and atomic technology”

Philip H. J. Davies and Kristian C. Gustafson, the director and deputy director of Brunel University's Center for Intelligence and Security Studies, wrote, “Iran's German networks were its most important in Europe, because they were derived from the special political relationship between Iran and Germany that has existed since the 19th century. ... Consequently, the working intelligence relationship between Germany and Iran was one that both parties made efforts to maintain” (“Intelligence Elsewhere: Spies and Espionage Outside the Anglosphere”).

The breakup of Yugoslavia saw an intensification of this relationship, as Germany's intelligence service, the bnd, worked with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (irgc) to smuggle weapons to anti-Serbian forces.

Now that appears to have broken down. On Jan. 16, 2018, Germany cracked down on an alleged Iranian spy ring, run by the al-Quds Brigade. In April 2020, it designated Hezbollah a terrorist group and raided mosque associations in four cities. On January 23, European Union leaders will discuss new sanctions on Iran. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock has indicated that Germany may now support listing the irgc as a terrorist organization, saying that the step “is politically important and makes sense.”

Meanwhile, Iranian attacks on Europe have stepped up. There was a plot to blow up a meeting of Iranian dissidents in Paris in June 2018. In October 2018, they tried to assassinate an Iranian dissident in Denmark. There was another assassination attempt in the Netherlands in 2018 and in the UK in 2020.

HEADLINE	01/17 Russia: teen jailed in Minecraft ‘terror’ case
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/russia-upholds-sentence-against-teen-who-planned-to-blow-up-fsb-building-in-minecraft
GIST	Russia’s Supreme Court has upheld a sentence imposed on a teenager who plotted to blow up a digital recreation of an FSB building in the video game Minecraft . Nikita Uvarov, 16, was one of three of the “Kansk teenagers” arrested in Siberia in 2020 and charged with terror offenses. The three 14-year-olds were detained after putting up leaflets about political prisoners on a real-world FSB building in the city of Kansk—two were given probation but Uvarov, who denied his guilt, was sentenced to five years in February 2022. “I am not a danger to society,” Uvarov said in court, independent media outlet SOTA Vision reported on Telegram on Tuesday. “I think five years in prison is too cruel. I repented, corrected myself and no longer plan to come into the view of the authorities and break the law.”
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Nexus: terrorism, human trafficking						
SOURCE	https://www.acamstoday.org/the-nexus-between-terrorism-and-human-trafficking/						
GIST	<p>Human trafficking (HT) constitutes a serious human rights violation and is one of the most profitable criminal enterprises, attracting both small local groups and international networks. In the context of war and armed conflict, HT is exacerbated by the instability, insecurity and economic desperation of vulnerable people, which allow terrorist organizations and violent extremist groups to engage in trafficking activities. In this regard, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) highlights that “Like other forms of illegal activities, human trafficking has become increasingly attractive to non-State armed groups, notably terrorist entities. Acts of violence associated with HT have been central to the modus operandi of the Islamic State [group] in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL [IS throughout the article], also known as Da’esh), Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA).”¹</p> <p>This article aims to explore how HT and terrorism intersect by focusing on the most common practices that terrorist organizations and violent extremist groups put in place and how they use methods pertaining to HT to exploit individuals for terrorism.</p> <p>The Three Essential Elements of HT</p> <p>The definition of HT in the “Trafficking in Persons Protocol” identifies three essential elements to consider: The act, the means and the purpose.² Table 1 breaks the three elements down.</p> <p>Table 1: HT elements</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>The Act</td><td>This refers to what is done, which can include recruitment, transfer or transportation, harboring and the receipt of persons. These neutral practices become criminal when they are conducted with the intention of exploiting a person.</td></tr> <tr> <td>The Means</td><td>This refers to how it is done, which can include the use of force or coercion, deception, fraud, abduction, the abuse of power, the abuse of a position of vulnerability, making payments or providing benefits to obtain the consent of a person, and exercising control over a person.</td></tr> <tr> <td>The Purpose</td><td>This refers to why it is done, including sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, the removal of organs, offenses committed under coercion and forced begging. The end goal is maintaining a person in a situation of exploitation.</td></tr> </table> <p>The Three Stages of HT</p> <p>As detailed in Table 2 below, it is also possible to divide HT into three different stages: The recruitment or abduction, the transportation and, ultimately, the exploitation of victims.</p> <p>Table 2: HT Stages</p>	The Act	This refers to what is done, which can include recruitment, transfer or transportation, harboring and the receipt of persons. These neutral practices become criminal when they are conducted with the intention of exploiting a person.	The Means	This refers to how it is done, which can include the use of force or coercion, deception, fraud, abduction, the abuse of power, the abuse of a position of vulnerability, making payments or providing benefits to obtain the consent of a person, and exercising control over a person.	The Purpose	This refers to why it is done, including sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, the removal of organs, offenses committed under coercion and forced begging. The end goal is maintaining a person in a situation of exploitation.
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Recruitment or Abduction	These occur when victims are obtained through deception or force.
Exploitation	The final stage of HT. Victims <u>are</u> exploited via sexual assault, forced labor, involuntary participation in crimes or other criminal activity, forced begging or removal of organs
Transportation	In HT, this refers to victims being “transported to locations where they are exploited or sold to other traffickers. Victims may originate from abroad or within the [borders of a country] and may be transported by air, sea and/or land domestically or internationally.” ³

The Acts of HT and Terrorism

Terrorist organizations employ various trafficking acts to recruit, transfer, transport, harbor and receive persons. The recruitment may occur in various venues such as the internet, social media, chat rooms, family and local community centers, places of worship and (deceptive) friendships or romance, which may also overlap.

Terrorism and Gender-Based Violence

Men and women are affected differently. Men and boys are typically recruited and lured into soldiering by preying on identity crises, whereas women and girls are generally recruited for supportive roles. This can be attributed to the fact that terrorism ideology is often linked to serious human rights abuses.⁴

The Recruitment of Women and Girls

The deceptive recruitment of women and girls with promises of gainful employment and romance are common modus operandi of terrorist organizations to lure them into situations of exploitation. In this regard, recruiters manipulate emotional vulnerabilities such as love, romance and marriage, as well as economic and social vulnerability, including deceptive job offers and financial incentives, or both. A common method to recruit women and girls is making false promises of marriage. During the transfer, transportation, harboring and receipt of women and girls, there is a shift from voluntary travel to an involuntary stay: “when women and girls join ISIL, they might find themselves in situations where an originally agreed-to-marriage takes on a nature of domestic servitude or sexual slavery.”⁵ In order to achieve the deceptive recruitment of women and girls, recruiters may paint a distorted view of life inside the controlled territory of the terrorist organizations. They falsely promote the idea of “sisterhood” or purposeful life; however, they are exploited or held in slavery when they arrive.

The Means of HT and Terrorism

To recruit, transfer, transport, harbor and receive persons; terrorist organizations employ various methods, which are referred to as means. It is worth highlighting that it is not necessary to prove the means when it comes to children being trafficked since they cannot consent to their own exploitation. The means can be divided into two categories: Physical or nonphysical means. Terrorist organizations can use a combination of both during different stages of the trafficking offense.

Abduction

The abduction of nationals, as well as foreign citizens, has been a common practice among terrorist organizations. As the Financial Action Taskforce (FATF) points out, abduction is also a means to secure ransom payments once the victims have been exploited.⁸ The 2022 U.S. Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report stated that “Terrorist groups Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISIS-WA) forcibly abducted children to serve as child soldiers, suicide bombers, child brides, and forced laborers.”⁹ The CTED also reported that “Boko Haram has abducted hundreds of girls in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states and subjected them to domestic servitude, forced labor, and sexual slavery through forced marriages to its militants.”¹⁰ According to Amnesty International, mass abductions still occur in the region and the threat remains so high that over 600 schools closed in Nigeria for fear of abductions. One of the most notable abduction incidents is the kidnapping of 276 female students from the Nigerian town of Chibok in April 2014.¹¹ In the same regard, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that in Somalia, “Children have nowhere to hide. Al-Shabaab has abducted them wherever they congregate: schools, playgrounds, football fields, and homes. Schools in particular have been attractive targets.”¹²

Abuse of Power or A Position of Vulnerability (APOV)

APOV occurs when the personal, situational or circumstantial vulnerability of an individual is intentionally used or taken advantage of; to recruit, transfer, transport, harbor and receive this individual for the purpose of exploiting them. These vulnerabilities can be either pre-existing or created by the trafficker. In addition, the Radicalization Awareness Network Centre of Excellence has laid out the following set of vulnerability factors: Individual sociopsychological factors, social factors, political factors, ideological and religious dimensions, the role of culture and identity issues, trauma and other trigger mechanisms; and three other factors that are a motor for radicalization, group dynamics, radicalizers/groomers and the role of social media.¹³

Table 3: Vulnerability Factors

Vulnerabilities	Examples
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical or mental disability
Situational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual being irregularly in a foreign country where they are socially or linguistically isolated
Circumstantial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual's employment or economic situation
Pre-existing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Belief• Culture• Family situation• Gender• Irregular status• Language• Mental or physical disability• Poverty• Pregnancy• Youth or old age
Created	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dependency cultivated through drug addiction• Irregular status• Romantic or emotional attachment• Social, cultural or linguistic isolation• The use of cultural or religious rituals or practices

Confiscation of Travel Documents

The confiscation of the victims' personal identity documents (e.g., passports) is a particularly effective method of preventing them from escaping since undocumented victims may feel that they have no choice other than to submit to exploitation. This technique has been used by IS. For example, this group "confiscates passports to make it more difficult to travel and forces people in the city to register so the militants can keep tabs on everyone."¹⁴ According to the CTED, the withdrawal of passports upon arrival appears to be systematic. The CTED also reported that some persons were informed that they would be given new "IS State" passports or that some women witnessed the burning of their identity documents.

Deception and Fraud

Deceptive practices involve the manipulation of a wide range of vulnerabilities, as described in the APOV section above. In the Model Law against Trafficking in Persons, deception is defined as follows:

"'Deception' shall mean any conduct that is intended to deceive a person or 'Deception' shall mean any deception by words or by conduct [as to fact or as to law], [as to]:

- The nature of work or services to be provided;
- The conditions of work;
- The extent to which the person will be free to leave his or her place of residence; or

- [Other circumstances involving exploitation of the person.]”¹⁵

On the basis of the commentary related to the unlawful handling of travel or identity documents, fraud may refer specifically to “Any person who without lawful authority makes, produces or alters any identity or travel document” or “Any person who obtains, procures, destroys, conceals, removes, confiscates, withholds, alters, replicates, possesses or facilitates the fraudulent use of another person’s travel or identity document.”¹⁶

Detecting Signs of HT

It is possible for financial institutions (FIs) to detect the early signs of HT, namely the acts (i.e., the recruitment, transfer or transportation, harboring and the receipt of persons) and the means (i.e., APOV, confiscation of travel documents, fraud). Some relevant examples shared by international organizations, include but are not limited to the indicators listed in Table 4.

Table 4: HT Indicators

Organization	Indicators
Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre (FINTRAC)¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transactions involving certain high-risk jurisdictions, such as locations in the midst of or in proximity to armed conflict where terrorist groups operate or locations that are subject to weaker money laundering/terrorist financing controls. • The client identified by media or law enforcement as having traveled, attempted, or intended to travel to high-risk jurisdictions (including cities or districts of concern), specifically countries (and adjacent countries) under conflict and/or political instability or known to support terrorist activities and organizations. • The client conducted travel-related purchases (e.g., purchase of airline tickets, travel visa, passport, etc.) linked to high-risk jurisdictions (including cities or districts of concern), specifically countries (and adjacent countries) under conflict and/or political instability or known to support terrorist activities and organizations. • The person or entity's online presence supports violent extremism or radicalization.
FATF²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of little, incomplete, or unverifiable information about the identity of the account holder or destination of the transfer. • Travelers are without luggage or identification papers. • The customer makes deposits/withdrawals or otherwise generally operates an account accompanied by an escort, handler or translator (who may hold the customer's ID). • High and/or frequent expenditure at airports, ports, other transport hubs or overseas, inconsistent with the customer's personal use or stated business activity. • Newly opened customer account appears to be controlled by a third party, including forms completed in different handwriting and/or the customer reads their address from a form. • Payments to logistics, airlines, coach companies, car rental or travel agents inconsistent with customer's personal use or stated business activity.
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioral Indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coercive behaviors by a potential trafficker acting on behalf of a victim. ○ The appearance of potentially trafficked individual. • Know your customer indicators

Conclusion

The fact that terrorist organizations systematically use acts of violence associated with the trafficking of human beings demonstrates that such practices are effective means to achieve their strategic objectives. For example, individuals who have been abducted with the aim of being exploited and are caught in their escape attempt often receive severe punishment. It is also worth mentioning that the

	<p>violence may not only be directed toward the abducted victims but also at their families and relatives in order to secure cooperation. HRW reported that in Somalia, “Children, their families, and their teachers who try to prevent recruitment and abduction or who attempt to escape face severe consequences. Al-Shabaab has killed or injured parents who intervened to protect their children.”²⁰</p> <p>Terrorist organizations operate primarily in conflict-stricken regions where access to formal financial services is limited (e.g., the Sahel region in Sub-Saharan Africa) can constitute a significant challenge for FIs to identify activity related to HT in the context of terrorist organizations and violent extremist groups. Nevertheless, FIs may still look out for a combination of indicators pertaining to both terrorist financing and the financial flows associated to HT.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	01/17 US reaffirms support for UAE against terror
SOURCE	https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2023/01/17/Biden-reaffirms-US-support-for-UAE-against-terrorism-one-year-since-Houthi-attacks
GIST	<p>President Joe Biden reaffirmed the US’ commitment to the safety and security of the UAE as the Gulf nation marks one year since the deadly Iran-backed Houthi attack on the country.</p> <p>“Working in close cooperation with my friend President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, the United States will continue to support the UAE as it defends itself against threats – whether from Yemen or anywhere else,” Biden was quoted as saying in a statement released by the White House.</p> <p>“We remain steadfast in our pursuit of diplomacy to bring a peaceful end to the war in Yemen, and the United States will continue to support the security of the UAE and our other partners in the Middle East, including providing needed military assistance,” it added.</p> <p>“Therefore, as we commemorate the tragic events of one year ago, we stand resolute to ensure it cannot happen again.”</p> <p>Three people were killed and six injured when a drone and missile attack caused a fuel tank to explode.</p> <p>At the time, the Yemen-based militia claimed responsibility for the attack saying it conducted an operation “deep in the UAE,” with the group’s spokesman saying they fired five ballistic missiles and “a large number” of explosive-laden drones at “sensitive sites” in the UAE.</p> <p>The act was met with global condemnation and threats of sanctions. The US, UK and France also agreed to bolster the UAE’s defenses.</p> <p>Adviser to the UAE President Dr. Anwar Gargash wrote on Twitter on the eve of the terrorist attack: “...The nation is more powerful and invincible and more determined to continue its development path. They [Iran-backed Houthis] wanted to shake confidence in our country, but it is stronger than any terrorist threat, proud of the determination of its leadership and people and its capabilities to protect its gains and achievements and our national cohesion.”</p> <p>He continued, “A year has passed, and terrorism has only increased us in strength and honor.”</p> <p>In 2020, Biden’s administration revoked a terrorist designation of the Houthis introduced by former President Donald Trump. Biden also announced ending US support for the operations of the Arab Coalition, which intervened in Yemen in 2015 to support the internationally recognized government.</p> <p>Yemen’s Iran-backed Houthis are still in control of the capital city of Sanaa. A UN-brokered truce deal agreed in April which rolled over twice delivered the longest stretch of relative calm that has largely held since its expiry on October 2.</p>

	The United Nations has been pushing for an extended and broader deal encompassing a mechanism to pay public sector wages, which the Houthis had criticized for not including armed forces members.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Al-Shabab attacks Somali military base
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/al-shabaab-launches-deadly-attack-on-somali-military-base/6921685.html
GIST	<p>Al-Shabab launched a deadly attack on a Somali military base on Tuesday, just a day after the government claimed a "historic victory" over the jihadists with the capture of a strategic coastal town.</p> <p>There were conflicting reports about the death toll after the Islamist fighters stormed the camp in the town of Hawadley north of the capital Mogadishu.</p> <p>Army chief Odowaa Yusuf Rage said on national radio that five soldiers including a senior officer had died in the attack claimed by the al-Qaida-allied militant group.</p> <p>A clan militia commander near Hawadley, which lies in the central Hirshabelle state, said 11 soldiers had died.</p> <p>The Islamists detonated a car packed with explosives outside the camp 60 kilometers (37 miles) north of Mogadishu before gunmen stormed the compound, witnesses and security officials said.</p> <p>Al-Shabab, which controls swathes of countryside in Somalia, claimed responsibility for the attack via its communication channels.</p> <p>In recent months, the army and local clan militias have retaken chunks of territory from the militants in Galmudug and Hirshabelle states in an operation backed by US air strikes and an African Union force.</p> <p>But despite the gains, al-Shabab has demonstrated the ability to strike back with lethal force against civilian and military targets.</p> <p>The Hawadley base had only been recaptured from al-Shabab in October last year by the Somali National Army (SNA) and allied militias.</p> <p>Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre on Monday proclaimed a "historic victory" over Al-Shabaab after the army took control of the strategic city of Haradhere in central Galmudug state without a fight.</p> <p>"The brave members of the national armed forces... have destroyed the enemy of the nation and liberated the strategic port town of Haradhere," he said in a statement.</p> <p>Haradhere had been a key supply route for Al-Shabaab for both people and goods after it seized the port in 2010, dislodging local militias and pirates.</p> <p>'Attempt to distract'</p> <p>Tuesday's attack "demonstrates al-Shabab's continued ability to produce explosive devices and deploy them within Hirshabelle state, where the offensive originally began", said International Crisis Group's senior analyst for eastern Africa, Omar Mahmood.</p> <p>"The group has mounted a number of similar assaults recently, likely an attempt to distract the government by attacking multiple locations," he told AFP in a message.</p> <p>On Saturday, eight people were killed in a roadside bombing claimed by al-Shabab in central Somalia, police said. Earlier this month, 19 people were killed in twin car bombings in Mahas, a town in Hiran district in Hirshabelle.</p> <p>Rage said the army had repelled the assault in Hawadley and was pursuing the militants who got away.</p>

	<p>"Five members of the army were martyred, including a senior military officer," he said, adding that the army had killed 21 al-Shabab fighters.</p> <p>Ahmed Mohamud, an SNA military commander in the nearby town of Balcad, said more than 10 people had died, but added that it was not clear how many were soldiers and that the toll was provisional.</p> <p>He said the army was "in full control" of the area.</p> <p>President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud had declared "all-out war" on the jihadists after taking office in May last year.</p> <p>Last week, he called on ordinary Somalis to help flush out members of the jihadist group he described as "bedbugs".</p> <p>Although forced out of Mogadishu and other main urban centers more than a decade ago, al-Shabab remains entrenched in parts of rural central and southern Somalia.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 UN blacklists Pakistani militant as terrorist
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/un-blacklists-pakistani-militant-after-china-lifts-block-/6922589.html
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD — China on Tuesday defended its decision to allow the United Nations to designate an anti-India militant leader as a global terrorist, saying the designation would enhance international cooperation against terrorism.</p> <p>Abdul Rehman Makki, 68, who is currently serving an unspecified jail term in Pakistan on terror charges, was added to the U.N. Security Council's sanctions list on Monday.</p> <p>India and the United States jointly proposed the listing last June, but China, a close ally of Pakistan, placed a so-called "technical hold" on the proposal, which it removed on Monday.</p> <p>"Terrorism is a common scourge for humanity," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a regular news conference in Beijing when asked about China's reversal.</p> <p>"The individual you mentioned has been convicted and sentenced by Pakistan, and this designation is a sign of recognition of Pakistan's staunch fight against terrorism," Wang noted. He described the U.N. listing mechanism as "conducive" to strengthening international cooperation against terrorist threats.</p> <p>Responding Tuesday to Makki's placement on the sanctions list, Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said her country was "a victim of terrorism and supports" international counterterrorism efforts, including those of the U.N.</p> <p>"The listing of Mr. Abdur Rehman Makki is a technical issue undertaken under relevant procedures of the United Nations Security Council. In any case, he has been convicted by a Pakistani court already," Baloch noted.</p> <p>She reiterated Islamabad's call for "strict compliance" with the Security Council's listing rules and procedures to "maintain the integrity of the U.N. counterterrorism regime." She did not elaborate.</p> <p>Arindam Bagchi, spokesman for India's Ministry of External Affairs, welcomed the U.N. listing of Makki, calling the procedure an "effective tool" to curb threats from regional terrorist organizations.</p> <p>"India remains committed to pursuing a zero-tolerance approach to terrorism," he said.</p> <p>Organizations and individuals added to the Security Council's ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions list are subject to assets freezes, travel bans, and arms embargoes.</p>

The U.N. statement on Monday identified Makki as the deputy chief of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militant group, also known as Jamat-ud Dawa, blamed for the 2008 attacks in the Indian city of Mumbai.

New Delhi accuses the Pakistani militant leader of playing roles in several terrorist attacks in India, including the Mumbai carnage, which killed 166 people. Foreigners were also among the victims.

Makki is the brother-in-law of LeT founder Hafiz Saeed, who is also serving a prison term in Pakistan on charges of financing anti-India militants.

Saeed denies India's allegations that he masterminded the Mumbai bloodshed.

Pakistani authorities arrested Makki in 2019, and a court sentenced him to six months in prison in 2020 on charges of financing terrorist activities. He remains in jail for reasons not immediately known.

Makki is also wanted by the U.S. in connection with the Mumbai attack, and Washington has issued a \$2 million bounty for his arrest.

New Delhi has long accused Islamabad of harboring and funding militant groups blamed for terror attacks on Indian soil and Muslim-majority parts of India-administered Kashmir.

Pakistan, which also administers part of Kashmir, denies the allegations as an attempt to divert attention from India's alleged human rights violations and atrocities against Kashmiris.

The nuclear-armed rival nations have fought several wars and limited conflicts, mainly over Kashmir, since gaining independence from Britain in 1947. The dispute remains at the center of bilateral tensions.

[Return to Top](#)

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 World oldest known person dies at 118
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/17/europe/france-oldest-person-world-dies-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>French nun Sister André, the world's oldest known person, died on Tuesday at the age of 118 in the southern city of Toulon.</p> <p>The city's mayor, Hubert Falco, announced the news of her death on Twitter, writing that "it is with immense sadness and emotion that I learnt tonight of the passing of the world's oldest person #SisterAndré."</p> <p>The nun's spokesman, David Tavella, said she died on Tuesday at 2 a.m. local time and lived near Toulon. "There is great sadness, but she wanted it to happen, it was her desire to join her beloved brother. For her, it is freedom," Tavella said.</p> <p>Born as Lucile Randon on February 11, 1904, Sister André dedicated most of her life to religious service, according to a statement released by Guinness in April 2022.</p> <p>Before becoming a Catholic nun, she looked after children during World War II and then spent 28 years caring for orphans and elderly people at a hospital.</p> <p>She was also the oldest nun to ever live, according to Guinness.</p> <p>When she turned 118 in 2022, the nun received a handwritten birthday note from French President Emmanuel Macron – the 18th French president of her lifetime. There have also been 10 different Popes presiding over the Catholic Church since she was born.</p>

	<p>She became the world's eldest following the death of Kane Tanaka, a Japanese woman previously certified as the world's oldest person, who died at the age of 119 on April 19.</p> <p>The title of the oldest person ever recorded also belongs to a French woman. Born on February 21, 1875, Jeanne Louise Calment's life spanned 122 years and 164 days, according to the Guinness World Records statement.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 People abandoning pets at airports
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/people-are-abandoning-pets-at-airports-don-t-be-like-them/ar-AA16rLBt
GIST	<p>In the past few weeks, three dogs and a tortoise arrived with their travel companions at various airports across the country. By all appearances, the pets were going to fly off with their humans. But at some point between check-in and boarding, their owners decided to leave the animals behind.</p> <p>One dog was found tied to a pole outside the airport in Des Moines. The tortoise was discovered in a restroom at Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas. A puppy was abandoned by a departure gate at the same airport. Another dog was surrendered to airline employees at Charlotte Douglas International, bringing to mind an incident last summer when a young dog was handed over to airline workers in San Francisco.</p> <p>"This is the wrong thing to do, morally and criminally," said Joe Stafford, director of animal services with the Animal Rescue League of Iowa, which assisted in the rescue and care of the pit bull that the staff named Allie. "There are a lot of resources that can help owners in any given situation."</p> <p>Reports of these orphaned animals surfacing in such quick succession raise an alarming question: How often are people deserting their pets at airports?</p> <p>"Animal abandonment has been around for a long time, but I don't think we are in an epidemic of people abandoning their pets at airports," said Holly Sizemore, chief mission officer with Best Friends Animal Society, an animal welfare nonprofit based in Utah. She shared one reason for the recent attention: "All things airlines have been in the news."</p> <p>In each of the aforementioned episodes, the travel community jumped in to help the animals in distress. Passengers and airline personnel joined forces with law enforcement and animal rescue operations to ensure the safety of the dogs — Allie, Penny, Polaris and Baby Girl — and Boeing the tortoise.</p> <p>"People called the police department and were sitting with [Allie]," said Stafford, who recommends contacting police in animal abandonment situations. "No harm had come to her."</p> <p>The majority of pet owners are not likely to leave their animals anywhere, anyhow. "Most people who travel with their pets are prepared and want their pets with them every step of the way," said Laura Sheehan, senior vice president of communications and legislative affairs with American Humane in Arlington, Va.</p> <p>However, flying with a four-legged friend requires an extra degree of preparation. The stories of the four dogs and the tortoise are more than morality plays; they are instructive examples of how failing to take the proper steps before traveling with a pet can leave you both in a bind. Here are some takeaways from their tales.</p> <p>Read the airline's rules for pets</p> <p>Travel requirements for pets vary among airlines and countries, and protocols have changed during the coronavirus pandemic.</p>

For example, U.S. carriers stopped allowing emotional support animals in the cabin in 2021. The same year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [temporarily suspended](#) the importation of dogs from countries with a high risk of rabies. Polaris, the puppy surrendered at the San Francisco airport in August, had flown in from China, one of the countries on the list.

“It’s not just the airlines, it’s where you’re going, too. What are they allowing?” said Kelly Donithan, director of global animal disaster response with [Humane Society International](#). “It all depends on the airline, the route and the destination.”

Start your research with the airline’s website, which will cover the carrier’s requirements, such as crate specs, breed restrictions, age minimums and cost, as well as country-specific regulations related to flying.

Airlines limit the number of animals permitted in the cabin, so make arrangements for your pet at the same time you book your own ticket. Carriers may not allow pets to fly in cargo during certain months or hours when the risk of extreme temperatures is high.

For entry requirements, the [Department of Agriculture](#) and the [CDC](#) are excellent resources. The State Department’s [Pets and International Travel page](#) offers a comprehensive overview, plus links to other agencies. The websites of foreign governments offer guidance and checklists, too. On [Canada](#)’s site, for example, you can plug in the type of animal, age and originating country, and a result pops out. For a pet dog, a traveler needs only proof of ownership and a rabies vaccination.

Some states require a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI), or health certificate, that you must obtain within 10 days of travel. The USDA’s [Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service](#) has a list of state requirements.

“There are a lot of hoops to go through,” Sizemore said, “but like anything with travel, the more you do it, the easier it gets.”

Lori Teller, president of the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#) (AVMA), warns against waiting till the last minute to plan your pet’s trip, especially since you might need to schedule vet visits and obtain hand-signed documents. She suggests starting preparations three to six months ahead for foreign travel, and a few weeks before a domestic trip. And make copies of all documents.

Choose the appropriate pet carrier

Two of the recent incidents involved issues with pet carriers. In Charlotte, Baby Girl’s case was too large to slide under the seat. The owner could not afford the cargo transport fees, so she surrendered her senior beagle mix to an airline agent.

Allie’s owner showed up at the Des Moines airport with only a leash and harness, according to Stafford. The Newark-bound traveler had (wrongly) assumed that the airline would supply the gear. However, Stafford said the owner could have contacted a shelter for assistance.

“They may sell you a good used crate or give you one if it came down to it,” he said.

The correct dimensions are critical. The animal must also fit comfortably inside. They should be able to lie down, stand up and turn around without bumping into the walls or roof. Their ears should not touch the top, either.

“Practice with your pet and see how he moves around,” said Donithan, who recommends Petmate carriers and kennels.

Make your contact information clear

Make sure your pet is microchipped and that the contact details are current. For an extra level of assurance, affix your contact information to the carrier, or scrawl your details on the case with a Sharpie pen.

Penny's only identifying accessory was a heart-shaped name tag. With little else to go on, the Animal Foundation in Las Vegas could not track down the 9-week-old puppy's owners. Allie did not have identification, either. Stafford said they located her owner through airport security cameras.

Also ask: Is your pet fit to travel?

Before you consider traveling with your pet, you should ask yourself a few questions. Does your pup (or cat or reptile) like new people and places? Are they bothered by the squeak of roller bag wheels and the hum of plane engines?

If your pet is shy, anxious or scared of unfamiliar noises and strangers, they will probably prefer a staycation with a sitter or an overnight at a boarding facility.

"A lot of pets are not adventurous," Teller said. "Flying is not like traveling in a car."

If your pet is intrepid but a little jittery, do not calm its nerves with sedatives or tranquilizers. The International Air Transport Association and AVMA advise against using these substances for animals traveling in the cabin and cargo.

"They can increase the risk of heart and respiratory problems," Teller said.

Storybook endings

The journeys of Polaris, Allie, Penny, Baby Girl and Boeing took unexpected detours, but all ended well.

In December, a United pilot based in San Francisco adopted Polaris. Penny and Boeing are living the Vegas life in their new homes. [FurBabies Animal Rescue](#), a local rescue group, placed Baby Girl in foster care and is raising funds to cover her medical expenses, including dental work.

Allie's story has a happy ending, too. At the Des Moines airport, a couple had played with the 1-year-old pup in the check-in line and noticed her owner exit the terminal. Unbeknown to them, they flew with Allie on the same Newark flight.

After their trip, they learned of Allie's travails and contacted the rescue league to inquire about adopting her. Since the owner had relinquished his rights to the dog, she was available. The Des Moines police department issued a warrant for the owner with a charge of abandonment of animals and failure to care for animals, both misdemeanors.

"To them and to me, I feel like she's in her new forever home," Stafford said.

Another couple who had met Allie on that fateful day also inquired about adopting her. Since she was already taken, Stafford found them another dog. One abandonment begot two adoptions.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Lawmakers hid messages citing 'privilege'
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/politics/2023/01/wa-democrats-hid-messages-chinese-american-history-month-bill
GIST	<p>A debate over establishing a Chinese American History Month is apparently the reason Democratic lawmakers in the Washington House redacted a dozen batches of emails, memos and text messages, even though public disclosure of legislative documents is required by state law.</p> <p>The topic of this discussion was revealed after Crosscut demanded to see the documents after lawmakers, including House Speaker Laurie Jenkins, had claimed "legislative privilege" to keep parts of them hidden.</p> <p>On Friday, House public records officials released to Crosscut two dozen batches of records that had been released last year, but that included hundreds of pages either partly redacted or completely blacked out, citing legislative privilege.</p>

The redacted documents provide a glimpse at the use of “[legislative privilege](#),” a legally untested concept for the Washington Legislature that supposedly allows lawmakers to shield certain records from the public. These new claims of “legislative privilege” come after the state Supreme Court ruled in 2019 that legislators [had violated the law by claiming](#) to be exempt from Washington’s voter-approved Public Records Act.

Advocates for government transparency say they don’t believe legislators have a constitutional right to hide their records. At least one legal challenge has been filed recently against the Legislature.

The released records shed new light – and raise new questions – about the practice of state lawmakers invoking the Washington state constitution to shield taxpayer-funded documents.

Included among them are documents from a Republican lawmaker who had apparently claimed legislative privilege over a proposed impeachment of Gov. Jay Inslee.

But the bulk of documents dealt with a proposal for a Chinese American History Month. The bill wasn’t controversial in the Senate; Democrats and Republicans voted unanimously to support [Senate Bill 5264](#).

Afterward, however, the bill sparked a fight among House Democrats wary of the conservative advocacy group, led by first-generation Chinese Americans, that was supporting the proposal. On top of that, Democratic lawmakers and progressive advocates worried about how many communities – and which ones – should get special designations and why.

Many of the redacted records were requested by the group proposing the new state recognition, WA Asians 4 Equality. These documents raise new questions about how the Legislature is applying the constitutional authority it believes it has, and what parts of their job some lawmakers don’t want the public to see.

One batch of House records released from the office of then-Rep. Javier Valdez yielded 81 pages of documents on the Chinese American History Month bill. Last year, Valdez, a Democrat from Seattle, was chair of the legislative committee considering SB 5264 in the House. More than 50 pages released by his office are partly or fully blacked out, citing legislative privilege.

But in an email, Valdez wrote that he never made any constitutional bid to hide his records.

“I did not personally request legislative privilege on the records you reference (or any records anyone has ever requested),” wrote Valdez, now a senator after November’s election win. “I do not know which House members or staff may have done so.”

Valdez was one of 25 state lawmakers contacted by Crosscut seeking further information about the practice of legislative privilege and requesting that the privilege be lifted so the public can see the complete documents.

In his email, Valdez authorized the release of his records in their complete and unredacted form. On Tuesday morning, Rep. Mari Leavitt, D-University Place, joined him, authorizing the full release of redacted records from her office relating to the proposal for Chinese American History Month.

Rep. Jim Walsh, R-Aberdeen, didn’t respond to a query sent by Crosscut about a batch of redacted records from his office. But in a news release Tuesday, Walsh announced his authorization of the release of records “produced while drafting gubernatorial impeachment documents.”

"It has come to my attention that my project to draft articles of impeachment of the governor has been drawn into the growing controversy over the use of 'legislative privilege' in Olympia," Walsh said in a statement.

"I have ordered House staff to release all relevant documents related to the impeachment project," he added. "While I could make a legitimate argument for legislative privilege on this project, of all projects, I believe this is the best step forward at this time."

Lawmakers may not have even known they were invoking a constitutional privilege last year when shielding their records.

In a news conference Tuesday afternoon, Jenkins, a Democrat from Tacoma, said that last year, House staff and attorneys used an "opt-out" system for invoking the constitutional right to withhold documents.

"And the member has been told historically, Let us know if you don't want to apply legislative privilege; if you don't let us know, it will be applied to these records," Jenkins said in a regularly scheduled news availability.

Starting this year, that practice was changed so that lawmakers have to opt in to use their constitutional privilege to withhold documents, Jenkins said, "as opposed to not responding and it being used if they didn't respond to the request."

It's unclear when lawmakers began to shield records using the concept of legislative privilege, which [was first reported earlier this month by McClatchy](#). Asked about the practice earlier this month, Jenkins explained that legislative privilege is a constitutional right that allows lawmakers to shield some documents.

"It is a privilege that every individual legislator has, so one of the things that happens in the rare circumstances that it's used ... is that an individual legislator, another member, could be on the same email," Jenkins said. "If they don't assert it, it still becomes a public record. And that's one of the interesting things about it, because it resides with each individual member."

Jenkins herself has used legislative privilege twice, she said on Tuesday. That includes one of the batches of redacted records released by the House that related to the Chinese American History Month proposal.

That original request for records came from WA Asians 4 Equality, the advocacy group supporting the bill. Asked Tuesday if she would waive her privilege and let the public see the records, Jenkins cited the pending legal challenge against the Legislature.

"Eventually the Supreme Court will tell us if it exists and if so, how it should be used, and so we'll have a court case on that," Jenkins said. "So I'm not going to talk kind of about the details about that."

Jenkins' redacted records include emails from Sen. Keith Wagoner, R-Sedro Woolley, the prime sponsor of SB 5264. After the Senate passed his bill, Wagoner worked with House Democrats to try to get it through the Legislature and onto Inslee's desk for his signature.

Wagoner has waived his legislative privilege, which should allow some of the blacked-out parts of Jenkins' records to be released.

"I am 100% willing to waive my legislative privilege (which was not invoked by me) to any documents related to this topic," Wagoner wrote in an email. "I will admit, I am curious myself what was redacted and why."

As recently as Tuesday morning, it seems to have been unclear even to Republican legislative leaders how the practice of legislative privilege functions. While Republican leaders have defended the concept, they appear to be using it less often than House Democrats.

"What appears to be happening ... is that there's a process where records that might be eligible for redaction are identified," said House Minority J.T. Wilcox, R-Yelm, said Tuesday in a regularly scheduled news conference. "And then it appears that the option is offered to the member."

But "It's very unclear to me right now whether or not there is a positive approval of the assertion of privilege, or if it becomes a default," Wilcox said Tuesday morning. "I thought I knew that yesterday, but I've heard some other cases today.

[Next: Inslee's proposed \\$70B WA state budget focuses on housing](#)

"I'm happy to have your questions, because I want to get to the bottom of it as well," Wilcox added.

"Because a whole bunch of this was happening in ways that I didn't understand, and I don't think were very clear to the members."

In an interview later, Wilcox said he was baffled about why SB 5264 failed in his chamber. "I think you know a lot more than I do," Wilcox said in an interview. "I asked repeatedly to have that bill run, and it was always fairly mysterious" why it didn't advance.

Reaching out to lawmakers

For this story, Crosscut contacted more than 25 state lawmakers – out of 147 total – about the practice of legislative privilege. Among other things, legislators were asked if they had invoked the constitution themselves – or if someone else did it for them. They were also asked if they would waive their privilege so the public could see their complete records.

Crosscut also reached out to lawmakers who hadn't claimed legislative privilege but whose redacted documents appear in other public records requests, like Sen. Jamie Pedersen, D-Seattle.

In an email, Pedersen wrote that he had never invoked legislative privilege, and explained the process as he understood it. Pedersen shared an email he received from a legislative public records analyst that he said is routine practice.

That email, called a "member review," was sent to Pedersen asking if he had any concerns about records about to be released publicly. Other legislative staffers are copied on the email, including Jeannie Gorrell, who as Senate Counsel is one of the lead attorneys at the Legislature.

"When the public records office is about to release an installment of records in response to a request, I typically receive a message such as the attached," Pedersen wrote. "My normal response is that I have no concerns about the release."

"I do not have any visibility into the interactions among Senate counsel, Senate administration, and the public records office about whether or when records are redacted," added Pedersen.

In another instance, Rep. Andrew Barkis, R-Olympia, said that he hadn't actively sought to invoke the constitution to shield his records in a request that sought documents related to transportation issues. Barkis is the ranking Republican on the House Transportation Committee.

"During the process of gathering the information to fulfill the PRA, it was brought to my attention by the public records officer that several emails with regards to the process in this particular subject 'fall under a legislative privilege exemption,'" Barkis wrote. "I sent [an] email back and inquired. I was given the particular emails that I can consider. I reviewed and made a few decisions on several emails. That was the last I heard anything until the recent discussion around it."

"I would lift the redacted areas on the emails if requested," he added.

Several House Democrats have been less forthcoming, particularly about the Chinese American History Month proposal.

Democratic Reps. Davina Duerr of Bothell and Bill Ramos of Issaquah – who both redacted records related to the bill – joined Jenkins in declining to comment citing pending litigation.

	<p>Other Democratic House lawmakers who redacted records about Chinese American History Month – including Reps. Mia Gregerson, Monica Stonier and Melanie Morgan – didn’t respond to Crosscut inquiries.</p> <p>More light could soon be shed on these and other government machinations. Crosscut has submitted the waivers of legislative privilege by Valdez, Leavitt, Wagoner, Barkis and Walsh to the Legislature’s public records staff to get the complete versions of the redacted documents.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Airports TSA confiscated most guns
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/airports-tsa-confiscated-most-guns-2022/507-c28288cc-bb9b-414f-bc53-a89598d0142c
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — TSA officers confiscated a record number of guns at airport checkpoints in 2022, agency officials announced Tuesday.</p> <p>The Transportation Security Administration said they discovered 6,542 firearms over the course of the year, 570 more than was found in 2021, which previously held the record.</p> <p>The TSA already knew it would be a record-breaking year before 2022 even finished. By Dec. 16, the agency had already confiscated a record 6,301 firearms on passengers or in their carry-on luggage, breaking the 2021 record. In the last 15 days of the year, 241 more guns were found among the luggage of holiday travelers.</p> <p>The agency reported that 88% of the guns they confiscated were loaded at the time.</p> <p>All those guns can be a costly mistake for travelers. In December, TSA raised the fines for carrying a gun through airport security because of the increase through 2022.</p> <p>Previously, an unloaded gun carried a fine between \$1,500 and \$2,475 and a criminal referral, while a loaded gun found at airport security could lead to a fine between \$3,000 and \$10,000.</p> <p>For the 241 guns found in the last two weeks of the year, the maximum fine for a loaded gun could be as much as \$14,950. Repeat offenders could rack up fines for even more, according to the agency's website.</p> <p>Federal law prohibits passengers other than certain law enforcement officers from bringing guns or ammunition into the cabin of a plane, although the law allows passengers to put guns in checked bags that go into the cargo hold if they are unloaded and in a locked case.</p> <p>Airlines don't have to permit guns even in checked bags. All leading U.S. carriers temporarily banned guns in checked bags on flights to Washington, D.C.-area airports for a week after the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol.</p> <p>The three airports where the most firearms were discovered in 2022 were the same as 2021's top three. Fourth place went to Nashville International Airport, which beat out 2021's No. 4, Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.</p> <p>While Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport maintained its spot at the top of the TSA's list, which it has held since 2019, fewer guns were found there in 2022 compared to 2021.</p> <p>And two airports were replaced on the list: New Orleans Louis Armstrong International Airport and Salt Lake City International Airport. Their spots were instead taken by Austin-Bergstrom International Airport and the Tampa International Airport.</p> <p>Which airports seized the most guns in 2022?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL) - 448

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (DFW) - 385 3. Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) - 298 4. Nashville International Airport (BNA) - 213 5. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (PHX) - 196 6. Orlando International Airport (MCO) - 162 7. Denver International Airport (DEN) - 156 8. Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS) - 150 9. Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL) - 134 10. Tampa International Airport (TPA) - 131
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Odd radar signal in eastern WA
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article271300707.html
GIST	<p>The National Weather Service is turning to the public for help solving a mystery in Benton County.</p> <p>It detected an odd Doppler radar signal between 7:15 and 8 a.m. Tuesday morning just west of Benton City and northeast of Prosser in Eastern Washington.</p> <p>The radar image shows typical movement of clouds across southeast Washington and northeast Oregon as the Doppler radar dish on a tower at Pendleton, Ore., picks up return signals.</p> <p>But not long after dawn Tuesday a uniform circle burst onto the screen showing some unknown activity near Benton City, and then it disappeared.</p> <p>Such detections can be a large grouping of solid objects, said weather service meteorologist Brandon Lawhorn. If a large wall of dust were moving into the area, the radar system could pick up an image. It also could pick up an emission of gases.</p> <p>Because the circle appeared in an agriculture area, it might be associated with a winery or food processing activity, Lawhorn said.</p> <p>Bats also can show up as they leave their home in the evening or return to roost, he said.</p> <p>Occasionally a large group of birds will be startled and show up as a ring on the radar detection system, he said.</p> <p>That's the most likely explanation, he said. But meteorologists thought the best way to identify the source was to ask the people who live in the Benton City area what it might be and if they had seen anything Tuesday morning.</p> <p>So they posted the image on the weather service Facebook page and asked for help.</p> <p>Not all the replies were serious.</p> <p>"Aliens," said one poster. Another suggested that the theme from "The Twilight Zone" should accompany the post. Other posters brought up the LIGO observatory that detects gravitational waves, which is more than 10 miles north of Benton City.</p> <p>"... producing gravity waves instead of just observing," joked one person.</p> <p>But there were also more serious replies. Starlings bunch up and move in a group, sometimes with thousands of birds, one person posted. Others mentioned cold storage facilities, fruit and winery facilities and a diversion dam near Benton City.</p>

The Hanford nuclear reservation also came up. The site produced plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons program through the Cold War and now environmental cleanup is underway.

But it is at least 10 miles away, the weather service posted.

[Return to Top](#)

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Threats against Congress members decline
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/17/Capitol-Police-threats-Congress-members/1241674007315/
GIST	<p>Jan. 17 (UPI) -- U.S. Capitol Police investigated 7,501 threats made against Congressional members last year, marking a decrease from 2021 while remaining historically high, an agency spokesman said Tuesday.</p> <p>The number of investigations into concerning statements and direct threats toward members of Congress for 2022 was a drop from the 9,625 investigations a year prior and still lower than the 8,613 cases in 2020 but follows an overall increase over the past few decades, officials said.</p> <p>The number of cases in 2022 is also the third highest in the last six years and is nearly double the 3,939 threat investigations in 2017.</p> <p>"The threats against members of Congress are still too high," U.S. Capitol Police Chief Tom Manger said in a statement. "This has resulted in a necessary expansion of, not only our investigative capabilities, but our protection responsibilities as well."</p> <p>The year 2022 included several high-profile threat cases, including the late October attack of Paul Pelosi, the husband of then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, at his home by a hammer-wielding man who was looking for the California Democrat. The suspect, David DePape, pleaded not guilty late last year to charges that included attempted murder.</p> <p>On Dec. 19, Joshua Hall was sentenced to 20 months' imprisonment after pleading guilty to threatening to kill Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., in a series of August phone calls to the Congressman's office.</p> <p>In July, a man attacked Rep. Lee Zeldin, R-N.Y., while the politician was campaigning in his state's gubernatorial race.</p> <p>And that same month, Brett Forsell was arrested on felony stalking charges connected to harassing Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash.</p> <p>During a Senate hearing in mid-December, Manger said threats and "directions of interests" targeting members of Congress have increase some 400% in the last six years -- a number which he described as "sobering."</p> <p>"I cannot overstate the scope, breadth and intensity of the nation's current threat climate. Hate, intolerance and violence are part of this disturbing trend," he said, stating in the past year, his department saw more than 9,000 threats against members of Congress.</p> <p>"The attacks on Rep. Lee Zeldin and Paul Pelosi, as well as the threats directed towards other members of Congress are a sad reminder of the extent to which our social fabric has frayed."</p> <p>He said to enhance protection, they will require more funds.</p> <p>"Identifying and mitigating those threats requires resources -- additional personnel, security assessments and other security enhancements for members, their families, their offices and their homes," he said.</p>

Manger said his force consists of some 1,966 sworn officers and 378 civilian employees. The U.S. Capitol Police [website](#) states it has an annual budget of some \$460 million.

In the wake of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on Congress, Capitol Police also opened new field offices in Florida and California to deal with the increase in threats.

Capitol Police added Tuesday that all members of Congress receive threats and the number of threats against both parties are similar.

Dr. Mario Scalora, the consulting psychologist for U.S. Capitol Police, said the increase in threats is directly related to Internet use and that a law enforcement solution alone is not the answer.

"Overall, during the last couple of decades, the Threat Assessment Section's caseload has increased because people on social media have a false sense of anonymity and feel more emboldened," Scalora said Tuesday. "This is not a problem we can only arrest our way out of."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/18 Shooter stood over mom, baby: both killed
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/drug-crimes-california-goshen-crime-fd32f55c3c2e882f4e7034dff2670125
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES (AP) — A shooter stood over a 16-year-old mother clutching her 10-month-old baby and pumped bullets into their heads in a brazen attack in a central California farming community that left six dead at a home linked to drugs and guns, a sheriff said Tuesday.</p> <p>Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux said the teenager was fleeing the violence early Monday when the killers caught up to her outside the home in Goshen, a central California community of about 3,000 residents in the agricultural San Joaquin Valley, and shot the young mother and her child “assassination-style.”</p> <p>The other four victims ranged from 19 to 72 years old, including a grandmother who was shot as she slept. Their autopsies are expected to be completed later in the week.</p> <p>Authorities said they were searching for two suspects and offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to their arrests.</p> <p>“None of this was by accident,” Boudreaux said during a news conference Tuesday. “It was deliberate, intentional and horrific.”</p> <p>Boudreaux walked back his earlier comments to reporters that the attack was likely a cartel hit, saying that investigators are also looking into whether it was gang violence.</p> <p>“I am not eliminating that possibility,” the sheriff said. “These people were clearly shot in the head and they were also shot in places where the shooter would know that a quick death would occur ... This is also similar to high-ranking gang affiliation and the style of executions that they commit.”</p> <p>Law enforcement is familiar with the home, the sheriff said, citing gang activity there that “has routinely occurred in the past” without giving any specifics. He added that not everyone who was shot was a drug dealer or gang member — and said that among the victims believed to be innocent are the teen, her grandmother, and of course, the baby.</p> <p>The sheriff’s department on Tuesday identified the victims as: Rosa Parraz, 72; Eladio Parraz, Jr., 52; Jennifer Analla, 49; Marcos Parraz, 19; Alissa Parraz, 16; and Nycholas Parraz, 10 months.</p> <p>Boudreaux said “there was no reason” for the shooters to kill the young mother and her child.</p>

“I know for a fact this 10-month-old baby was relying on the comfort of his mother. There was no reason for them to shoot that baby, but they did,” he said.

Samuel Pina said Alissa was his granddaughter and the baby, Nycholas, was his great-grandson.

“I can’t wrap my head around what kind of monster would do this,” he told The Associated Press on Monday.

Pina said Parraz and her baby were living with her father’s side of the family in Goshen, and that her dad’s uncle, her dad’s cousin, her grandmother and her great-grandmother were also killed.

He said the family is in shock.

“It comes in big waves,” he said.

Authorities received a call at 3:38 a.m. Monday about multiple shots being fired — so many that it initially seemed like an active shooter situation — at the residence in the town of Goshen, some 170 miles (273.59 kilometers) south of downtown Los Angeles.

It was later determined the person who made the call was someone hiding at the property. Deputies arrived seven minutes later and found two bodies outside the home in the street, and a third body at the doorstep, Boudreaux said.

Deputies found more victims inside the home, including the grandmother. Down the street they discovered the teen mom and her baby. A forensics investigation revealed she had tried to run away before the shooter caught up with her and stood over her and fired multiple rounds into her skull, Boudreaux said.

“It is very clear that this family was a target,” he said.

Three people survived and will be interviewed by authorities. They include a man who hid in the home as the killings happened.

“He was in such a state of fear that all he could do was hold the door, hoping he was not the next victim,” Boudreaux said.

On Jan. 3, a search warrant at the home led to the arrest of Eladio Parraz Jr., a convicted felon who was killed in the shooting Monday — though Boudreaux said Parraz Jr. was not the “initial intended target” and declined to elaborate. Parraz Jr., 52, had an extensive criminal record including driving recklessly to evade arrest, and possessing firearms and drugs, according to prison records.

The search warrant stemmed from a parole compliance check during which investigators found shell casings on the ground, the sheriff said. The occupants refused to let officials inside the home, Boudreaux said.

They returned with a search warrant and arrested Parraz Jr. after discovering ammunition, a rifle, a shotgun and methamphetamine in the home, court records show. He was released on bail four days later.

Rural California is no stranger to drug-related violence. In 2020, seven people were fatally shot in a small, rural Riverside County town where the property had been used for an illegal marijuana growing operation — a common practice in that area.

The following year, a man accidentally shot himself while working at his family’s illegal marijuana grow in Butte County’s Forbestown. His father and two brothers were accused of moving his body to prevent investigators from discovering the grow site.

HEADLINE	01/17 Jailed 'El Chapo': 'SOS' to Mexico president
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/jailed-el-chapo-drug-kingpin-040629262.html
GIST	<p>Notorious drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman has appealed to Mexico's president for help due to alleged "psychological torment" he is suffering in a US prison, his lawyer said Tuesday.</p> <p>"In the six years that Joaquin has been in the United States, he has not seen the sun," said Jose Refugio Rodriguez, a Mexico-based legal representative of the Sinaloa cartel founder.</p> <p>The message, described as "an SOS," was transmitted via one of Guzman's lawyers in the United States as well as his family, Rodriguez said.</p> <p>Guzman is only allowed outside three times a week to a small area where he "doesn't get the sun," and has fewer visits or phone calls than other inmates, the lawyer said in an interview with Radio Formula.</p> <p>"He is suffering psychological torment," he said, adding that the lack of sunshine was also bad for the convicted drug trafficker's physical health.</p> <p>Guzman wants President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador to address alleged procedural violations during his extradition in 2017 under the former government, Rodriguez added.</p> <p>The Mexican embassy in Washington confirmed on Twitter on Tuesday that it received an email from Rodríguez on January 10.</p> <p>Without referring to the content of the email, Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard downplayed the chance of any government intercession in favor of the notorious drug trafficker.</p> <p>"He is serving a sentence there, he has a sentence," he told journalists. "So, frankly I don't see any possibilities for him, but I'm going to review it with the prosecutor's office."</p> <p>El Chapo is serving a life sentence in the United States after being convicted in 2019 of charges including drug trafficking, money laundering and weapons-related offenses.</p> <p>One of his sons, Ovidio Guzman, was arrested by Mexican security forces this month in an operation that left 29 people dead and sparked a dramatic shootout at an airport in the city of Culiacan.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/18 Life sentences: slaying of MI security guard
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/3-sentenced-life-slaying-michigan-security-guard-face-mask-order-rcna66248
GIST	<p>FLINT, Mich. — A married couple and their son convicted of first-degree premeditated murder in the fatal shooting of a security guard who demanded the woman's daughter wear a mask while shopping were sentenced Tuesday to life in prison without parole.</p> <p>Larry Teague, wife Sharmel Teague, and Sharmel Teague's son, Ramonyea Bishop, were sentenced by Genesee Circuit Court Judge Brian Pickell in the shooting death of Calvin Munerlyn on May 1, 2020.</p> <p>The three were convicted of first-degree premeditated murder, a crime that carries a mandatory punishment of life in prison without parole, following a trial that spanned several weeks, The Flint Journal reported.</p> <p>Munerlyn, 43, was shot at the store just north of downtown Flint shortly after telling Sharmel Teague's daughter she had to leave because she lacked a mask, Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton has said.</p> <p>Two men later came to the store and shot the security guard to death, investigators said.</p>

	Bishop's sister, Brya Bishop, was charged with tampering with evidence, lying to police and being an accessory to a felony. She was sentenced in November to time served and probation.
Return to Top	
HEADLINE	01/18 Trends shaping financial crime in 2023
SOURCE	https://complyadvantage.com/insights/four-trends-shaping-the-state-of-financial-crime-in-2023/
GIST	<p>2023 was supposed to be the year we escaped the shockwaves of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the results of our annual survey of 800 C-suite and senior compliance decision-makers across the US, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Netherlands, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Australia suggest otherwise.</p> <p>Here are four top trends we've identified from the financial institutions in our survey:</p> <p>1. Economic volatility is reshaping attitudes to risk</p> <p>99 percent of organizations globally told us they're re-evaluating their risk appetite due to the economic environment. 57 percent are doing so "to a great extent." This more conservative approach, and the additional customer due diligence it will require, is set to pile further pressure on the expectation that access to financial services is slick and frictionless.</p> <p>Underlying industry caution is an expectation that, as in previous economic downturns, levels of financial crime will increase. This may not entirely come from hardened professional criminals, either. Economic pressure is likely to drive a wider increase in risk-taking behavior from previously legitimate actors, some of which will cross the line into financial crimes.</p> <p>While the economic outlook is bleak, compliance professionals are realistic. 59 percent are braced for increased financial crime, with 58 percent planning to hire more staff. Despite expectations that unemployment rates will rise – and double in the US by the end of 2023 – just 11 percent of organizations anticipate reducing the size of their compliance staff.</p> <p>2. Fraud and scams continue to evolve</p> <p>Our survey data showed tax and investment fraud as the joint top concerns for compliance professionals in 2023. While both are likely fuelled by the economic downturn, investment fraud, in particular, often runs counter-cyclically to the economy. As easier methods of accessing finance dry up, the temptation to resort to bogus schemes offering apparently "market-beating" returns increases.</p> <p>Credit and debit card fraud remained a major concern, cited by 39 percent of respondents. Much of this is driven by e-commerce, with purchases made via phone, internet, or mail-order using stolen cards estimated to surpass \$10bn by 2024. The popularity of credit cards for online purchases means they are involved in a significant amount of this fraud.</p> <p>Emerging typologies such as synthetic identity fraud also featured significantly, surpassing concern about crimes such as elder and romance fraud. KPMG cites synthetic ID fraud as the fastest-growing financial crime in the United States, costing banks more than \$6bn. 2023 is likely to see synthetic ID fraud grow further, with criminals identifying new ways to exploit consumers aligned with ongoing economic pressures. One example of this is mortgage fraud. As rising interest rates push up mortgage costs in many countries, those desperate to attain financing may seek to use more advanced but increasingly accessible technologies to bypass lender requirements that are becoming progressively more stringent.</p> <p>3. Environmental crime surges as enforcement lags</p> <p>International concern about environmental crimes and wildlife trafficking soared in 2022, reflecting the threat posed to food security, political stability, conflict, and forced migration. When asked which predicate offenses were most important to their organizations, more than one in four selected environmental crime, making it one of the top selected offenses. This is despite its inclusion in our survey for the first time in 2022. Environmental crime was also the second highest typology of concern for firms when submitting suspicious activity reports (SARs), behind only tax evasion.</p>

Some of the growth in demand driving environmental and wildlife crimes can be attributed to the easing of pandemic restrictions, which has made activities like poaching easier. In June 2022, [China also suspended a wildlife trade ban](#) introduced in January 2020 to tackle potential sources of COVID spread. The global downturn has already led to [scaled-back resources](#), resulting in less capacity to train rangers and investigators in source countries, including Botswana, South Africa, Kenya, Namibia, and Tanzania. Against this backdrop, [United for Wildlife](#) estimates illegal wildlife traders will “return to full profitability within 2-3 years.”

4. Crowdfunding is fueling political extremism

This year our global survey asked about the use of decentralized finance platforms to support extremist political groups for the first time. 87 percent of respondents said they’d seen an increase in the use of these platforms to fund extremism, with 31 percent believing the growth to be “significant.”

Protests across Ottawa and US-Canada border crossings have elevated global concern about the use of crowdfunding platforms for extremist groups. On February 4th, 2022, GoFundMe closed a campaign supporting the [“Freedom Convoy”](#) due to concern it had become an “occupation” and amidst widespread reports of violence. The group then pivoted to GiveSendGo, a platform which, according to The Washington Post, describes itself as “the leader in Christian fundraising,” where it raised over \$9m.

Crowdfunding has also supported [Islamic State \(IS\) operatives](#) in Syria. Reporting indicates family members of young men trapped in Syrian camps have attempted to use the Telegram messenger service to “bring them to safety.” It’s believed some of those looking to escape are doing so to fight for IS. In a report issued on March 1, 2022, the US Treasury explained how [domestic extremists](#) have used legal fundraising methods to support their activities, making them harder to detect. The Treasury also highlighted the pandemic’s role in making these platforms “a necessity rather than a convenience.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Man threatens mass shootings at FBI, DHS
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/colorado-man-accused-of-threatening-mass-shootings-at-fbi-dhs-used-fbis-online-tip-form/
GIST	<p>A Colorado man accused of threatening to conduct mass shootings at the FBI’s Denver office and Department of Homeland Security offices declared on his Twitter account the day before his arrest that “the USA government is run by a bunch of pedos” and used the FBI’s online tip portal to warn that he would try to “kill as many” people there “as possible.”</p> <p>Kyle Staebell, 33, of Evergreen, Colo., was arrested Monday and charged with 18 U.S.C. § 875(c), transmitting interstate threats. In addition to utilizing the FBI’s National Threat Operations Center to warn about himself, the criminal complaint alleges that he sent an email to an unnamed performing arts center in Colorado that stated, “Hello, tomorrow I am going to do a mass shooting and kill fucking everybody I see in the whole building.”</p> <p>An image of the email in the complaint shows an email signature with Staebell’s full name, listing his title as “communications consultant,” with a redacted phone number and address, and a link to a LinkedIn page. That page posted five days ago, “I’m happy to share that I’m starting a new position as Bum at Unemployment!!”</p> <p>According to the FBI, a person believed to be Staebell was seen on surveillance footage appearing “to circumvent security and enter restricted parts of the building, including backstage” at the performing arts group’s building in mid-December. Staebell allegedly told agents he was there because “he wanted to conduct an orchestra with a Harry Potter wand that he claimed he had found” and added “that orchestra conductors use witchcraft wands to conduct orchestras.”</p>

In the early hours of Monday morning, the FBI's NTOC online tip line received a submission under Staebell's name stating that the next day "I am going to walk up to the FBI offices and start shooting everyone I see and will throw explosives."

The threats against DHS are in a screenshot of tweets made early Monday, according to the affidavit. Some of those tweets no longer appear on the still-live Twitter account attributed to Staebell, including the tweet "How to do a mass shooting at the DHS offices? How to do a mass shooting at the FBI offices?" as well as one declaring, "TOMORROW I WILL DO AL [sic] MASS SHOOTING AT THE FBI AND DHS OFFICES."

Before search warrants could be executed Monday, the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office responded to Staebell's residence after his mother reported that during an argument with his brother Staebell "threw a mug on the ground and threw dirt at his brother." Staebell met deputies "holding a laptop, a cellphone, his passport, and a jacket," and stated that his girlfriend worked for Mexico intelligence and hacked his accounts and social media, officials said.

According to the affidavit, a search of the home revealed "what appeared to be a Molotov cocktail" and a handwritten note listing DHS, FBI, and an apparent reference to the performing arts group. When questioned by law enforcement, Staebell allegedly said he "is upset at the government because the government had not responded to previous reports that he filed" and "stated the government is full of pedophiles."

Staebell made his initial appearance in federal court today.

"The U.S. Attorney's Office takes very seriously any threat to commit mass violence," United States Attorney Cole Finegan said in a statement. "We commend our law enforcement partners for taking swift action to investigate this case."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 Shootings result from defund movement?
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3782884/tacoma-police-union-president-shooting-result-defunding-movement/
GIST	<p>Tacoma Police Union president Henry Betts said we are now seeing the results of the police "defund" movement and that law enforcement needs "more support" to do its job.</p> <p>There were 79 killings across Pierce County last year, up from 68 in 2021, according to the Tacoma News-Tribune. There have also been several already this year, with more involving youth.</p> <p>"We've got to think back to decisions that were made two and three years ago, and I think our society is so fast-paced now, everything is so instant, that we forget that decisions we make in the past," Betts said on the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH. "I'm alluding to 'defunding,' removing police from a lot of the equation here. We removed our School Resource Officers program. We were kicked out of the schools. We don't have a gang unit. We don't have a violence reduction team. Overall staffing reductions, the defined movement, where we reduced our budget greatly."</p> <p>Drive-bys and shootings involving children seem to be increasing quickly. Rantz wondered, "Whenever I see the kinds of criminal acts with youth, when guns are being fired from cars, for example, it makes me think of gang violence. Is that what's going on right now?"</p> <p>"In general, I think when we look over the rise in shootings that we've had in the last couple of years, that's definitely a major factor in it," Betts explained. "It seems that when we actually have somebody die, it gets a lot more attention. I don't think that this is an anomaly."</p> <p>Betts said he doesn't believe the dramatic increase in crime has not been months in the making but years.</p>

“I think when you see them back to back, it gets the media attention. So it’s more discussed,” Betts said. “But I don’t think it’s an anomaly or a sudden occurrence. I think we’ve had a lot of shootings in the last couple of years, and they just haven’t gotten as much play.”

The other thing that Betts believes is leading to the increase in shootings is the lack of community and political support for law enforcement.

“We deal with a lot of the kids, these are children, and they deserve to grow up safe and to be safe in the environment. At times, when there is a life safety issue, though, we need to support the police who have to come in and take enforcement action,” Betts said. “And that lack of support is having really bad outcomes. So when we do take action to arrest a juvenile, it’s important to have two things. One is being supported by leadership and community leaders to say it was right for the officers to come in and make that arrest with a kid with a gun, or after a shooting or after a homicide.

“Another is that when we arrest the responsible party if that’s a juvenile, we should not be getting push back or be constantly labeled ‘the bad guys’ for making that arrest,” Betts explained. “We owe it to the rest of the community to make an arrest for those violent crimes.”

Betts told Rantz that the way policing works in America is by prioritization.

“If we have pending priority calls, we’re not going to be doing those other programs and the other things that allow us to engage with youth, like being active in the school.”

Betts said police don’t have the resources to be part of programs that prevent crime in the long run.

“I know that previously, those programs, the ability to have a gang unit that was out there contacting a lot of the youth prior to there being a homicide, talk to them when it’s just a fight at the school, or interact and call the school resource officer to get some information about a new name that popped up. We’re missing that now. And I think we’re kind of seeing the end result of that.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/17 SPD walks back order on DUI suspects
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3782345/rantz-seattle-police-department-walks-back-order-dui-suspects-flee-stolen-cars/
GIST	<p>A Seattle Police Department policy forced officers to allow DUI suspects to flee, even when they’re in stolen cars. And if a DUI suspect in a vehicle refused to comply, officers were told to leave the scene.</p> <p>After a rash of incidents where DUI suspects bolted and amid considerable internal pressure, the SPD has walked the directive back. But it’s causing even more confusion for officers. The police union says the changes may lead to more unnecessary officer disciplinary complaints and hearings.</p> <p>The mandate, which originated from the North Precinct on Sept. 29, 2022, was a draft policy. But it was being followed by officers across the city, with officers explaining to the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH that they were explicitly told to follow the guidance. Instead of addressing the confusion over the policy in September, the department waited over three months, which further legitimated the draft policy.</p> <p>The clarified vehicular technique rules</p> <p>Officers received an email on January 13 labeled “approved by Chief Diaz.” An SPD spokesperson said they issued this email memo as a clarification, but said it’s “not a new policy.” But it did rescind much of what was in the draft policy.</p> <p>“Blocking” a suspect vehicle with a patrol vehicle can now be used when an officer believes it is an appropriate tactic. Officers may now use vehicle-to-vehicle contact (or pinning/pinching) when the suspect in the car “poses a public safety threat because of observed extreme and unsafe behavior” or if there is</p>

“reasonable suspicion that the suspect vehicle poses an immediate threat of death or serious physical injury to another.”

Officers may not ram a suspect vehicle unless an “exigent” circumstance presents itself, “all other reasonable means to stop the vehicle have failed or were not available,” and officers believe the suspect “poses an imminent threat of serious physical injury or death to another.”

Patrol officers may not use the Pursuit Intervention Technique (PIT) unless they have specialized training and the suspect either “poses a public safety threat” or there is “reasonable belief” that he does. A PIT is a “forced rotational stop” of a suspect fleeing a pursuit. How often this technique would ever be used is questionable. SPD, as a policy, prohibits vehicular pursuits and a PIT can only be used when a suspect is driving away.

No matter the technique, officers are instructed to “consider the safety risk to officers, the public, and the occupants of the vehicle.” And vehicular pursuits are still banned, meaning these clarifications are meant as tactics officers can take to try to stop the suspect from fleeing in the first place.

“Policy clarifications are frequently issued when legislative changes or other legal rulings impact existing department procedures. There are currently state-level discussions that may further impact these types of vehicle tactics and further clarification may be needed. The recent clarifications were made in coordination with the OPA [Office of Police Accountability] and OIG [Office of Inspector General],” an SPD spokesperson emailed the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH.

Police union and SPD react

Some officers were livid with the original memo. They say there have been consistent cases of DUI suspects choosing to ignore officers. And the thought of letting a man in a running car, clearly passed out from drug use, was disturbing. Those suspects posed a clear threat. But now they can intervene.

Some police speaking to the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH expressed their support of this new policy, though there was a worry echoed by Officer Mike Solan, president of the Seattle Police Officer’s Guild (SPOG). The policy clarification puts the decision on the officer’s shoulders rather than clearly explain what the *department* expectation is. In a city that wasn’t driven by anti-police animus, this wouldn’t be a concern. But this is Seattle.

“The end is going to be every decision is going to be based upon the officer at the scene,” Solan explained exclusively to the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH. “And then, therefore, if they make a judgment call blocking said person using their vehicle, well, I think the scrutiny is going to be overwhelming. And those [officers] can find themselves into perhaps significant discipline, based upon an interpretation of how the incident goes, and how it plays out on body-worn video. So it doesn’t give me the warm and fuzzy to feel as if they’re going to be supported when they make these decisions to try to meet community concerns.”

Moreover, the policy clarification is happening with the backdrop of pursuits being banned.

“More people are now as confused as ever,” Solan explained exclusively to the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH. “Cops just want to be able to do our jobs. And we understand that the backdrop of the reform bills where police are basically forbidden to pursue these suspects outside of a major felony. But when you have somebody that’s passed out, which is more often than not, particularly in the city of Seattle, and when those people come to, when the police are present, more often than not, they hit the gas, and they try to flee the area. And so cops are left, you know, dealing with 911 calls where community is reporting this hazard. And when police get there, clearly they want to investigate the suspicious circumstances. But then, more often than not, they’re left with more confusion as terms of command and what the orders are given. It’s quite unclear.”

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/17/bad-neighborhoods-1-counties-responsible-42-america/
GIST	<p>Homicide rates have spiked, but most of America has remained untouched.</p> <p>Only a tiny fraction of U.S. counties account for nearly all of the country's homicides, according to research released Tuesday that showed a striking concentration where killings take place.</p> <p>The worst 31 counties — generally urban jurisdictions — have about a fifth of the country's population but accounted for 42% of the country's homicides in 2020, said John R. Lott Jr., president of the Crime Prevention Research Center, which conducted the study.</p> <p>The worst 5% of counties accounted for 73% of homicides. That ticked up slightly from 69% in 2014 and 70% in 2016.</p> <p>Meanwhile, 52% of counties recorded no homicides in 2020, and another 16% recorded only a single killing.</p> <p>"Murders are a problem in a very small percentage of the counties in the United States," Mr. Lott told The Washington Times.</p> <p>Even in those higher-homicide counties, the crime is still concentrated, he said.</p> <p>Mr. Lott crunched the data for Los Angeles County and found that 10% of the county's ZIP codes accounted for 41% of the homicides. Another 10% accounted for 26% more.</p> <p>"Murder isn't a nationwide problem. It's a problem in a small set of urban areas, and even in those counties murders are concentrated in small areas inside them, and any solution must reduce those murders," he wrote in his report.</p> <p>Mr. Lott relied on FBI data for his study, using the bureau's Supplementary Homicide Report. For states that don't report data to the FBI or where the data is believed to be a dramatic undercount, he relied on public uniform crime reports.</p> <p>Cook County in Illinois — home to Chicago — led the country with 775 reported homicides in 2020. It was followed by Los Angeles County at 691, Houston home Harris County in Texas at 537, Philadelphia at 495 and New York's five boroughs at 465.</p> <p>Mr. Lott's statistics show those five jurisdictions alone combined for about 15% of the year's homicides.</p> <p>They also generally had authorities who pursued less stringent approaches to crime. Mr. Lott said the correlation with the data is tough to avoid.</p> <p>"It's primarily in those heavily urban areas where you're having the most lax approaches to crime on average, and that's where we're seeing the biggest increases," he told The Times. "That's why we're seeing their share of murders and other violent crimes increased."</p> <p>Mr. Lott's findings could explain one of the quirks in public polling in the run-up to the midterm congressional elections last year.</p> <p>Surveys showed that voters placed violent crime high on their lists of concerns, though the same surveys often found that respondents didn't fear for their own safety.</p> <p>Criminologists have long identified higher crime rates in urban areas, but they say the matter is more complicated than mere population.</p>

	<p>Some analysts point to blighted neighborhoods, high levels of truancy and other measures of social disunity as factors. Others point to lower arrest rates.</p> <p>The year 2020 was striking for its increase in homicides and for some other pressure points, including the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, which sparked waves of unrest and attempts to curtail policing.</p> <p>The mayhem continued into 2021, when some major cities reported record-high homicide counts.</p> <p>The latest data suggests that homicide rates cooled off in 2022, though violent crime may still have ticked up.</p> <p>Mr. Lott pointed to an inverse correlation in his study between counties with high homicide totals and gun ownership.</p> <p>He said he doesn't put too much weight on that point but added that it does serve as a challenge to the kinds of solutions Democrats are eyeing.</p> <p>"President Biden and Democrats want to talk about violent crime as a gun problem. Over 92% of violent crime has nothing to do with guns," Mr. Lott said. "The way you reduce violent crime or gun crime is the same way: You have to make it risky to go and commit the crime."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 DOJ cuts companies fines that admit crimes
SOURCE	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-17/doj-offers-75-reduction-in-fines-to-companies-admitting-crimes
GIST	<p>The Justice Department will recommend as much as a 75% reduction in fines for companies that voluntarily report wrongdoing to the government and fully cooperate with investigations.</p> <p>Even companies that don't voluntarily disclose wrongdoing but still fully cooperate with investigations could still get a 50% reduction off the low end of the guidelines for fines, the head of the department's criminal division said Tuesday.</p> <p>"The policy is sending an undeniable message: come forward, cooperate, and remediate," Assistant Attorney General Kenneth Polite said in a speech at Georgetown University Law Center. "We are going to be closely examining how companies discipline bad actors and reward the good ones."</p> <p>The announcement builds on changes to the department's corporate enforcement policy being put into place and previously announced by Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco.</p> <p>The discounts apply to companies that face fines for misconduct that include aggravating factors, Polite said. In other cases, companies could avoid any fines when they voluntarily disclose misconduct, cooperate with investigations and fully prevent the problems from recurring.</p> <p>"These changes offer companies new, significant and concrete incentives to self-disclose misconduct," Polite said. "And even in situations where companies do not self-disclose, the revisions to the policy provide incentives for companies to go far above and beyond the bare minimum when they cooperate with our investigations."</p> <p>Under the new policy, prosecutors also might decline to bring charges against companies over crimes with aggravating factors if those companies can demonstrate they meet certain requirements, Polite said. Those include companies that make voluntary disclosures immediately upon learning of alleged wrongdoing, have effective compliance program already in place and provide exceptional cooperation and remediation.</p>

	<p>“Failing to take these steps, a company runs the risk of increasing its criminal exposure and monetary penalties,” Polite warned. “Our job is not just to prosecute crime, but to deter and prevent criminal conduct.”</p> <p>The department is seeking to build on successful cases last year in which it scored guilty pleas over corporate misconduct from Glencore and a unit of Allianz in exchange for billions of dollars in fines.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Violent crimes Tacoma, Pierce Co. cities up
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article270902872.html
GIST	<p>On a national scale, the increasing violence Americans have seen since 2020 began to calm last year. But Pierce County defied that trend with an increase in homicides in 2022.</p> <p>There were 79 killings across Pierce County last year, up from 68 in 2021. That figure includes Tacoma, the cities and towns in the county such as Lakewood and Puyallup, as well as unincorporated areas. And as the deaths have risen, law enforcement agencies’ solve rate has fallen. Twenty-one of last year’s total homicides are so far unsolved.</p> <p>Violent death reached the oldest and youngest people in Pierce County’s cities and towns, and the motivations of their killers ranged from petty disputes to a decade-old grudge, drug- and gang-related killings, domestic violence, road rage, robbery and self defense. The youngest victim was 2-year-old Sarai Brooks, who died allegedly at the hands of her parents. The oldest was 80-year-old Raymond Plattner, whose grandson was charged with his murder. The News Tribune’s analysis of the homicides shows that of those known to have committed a homicide, 95 percent were men. Homicide victims were 78 percent men and 22 percent women.</p> <p>Nine people died in shootings involving police, including Deputy Dominique Calata, a 35-year-old father gunned down by a man avoiding an assault trial.</p> <p>The violence was particularly bad in Tacoma, which saw 45 killings last year, up from 34 in 2021, previously the city’s deadliest year. According to state crime records dating back to 1980, the closest Tacoma has come to matching those grim records was in 1988, 1994 and 2020, when the city had 33 homicides.</p> <p>Tacomans have responded to the violence with calls for action. In July, hundreds of people marched through Hilltop after 14-year-old Iyana Ussery was murdered. Months before, Foss High School students staged a walkout to protest gun violence. Nearly all of the homicides in the county last year (92 percent) were shootings.</p> <p>Tacoma has poured at least \$491,000 into an ongoing plan to reduce violent crime, but city leaders, local experts and Tacoma’s police union disagree on its effectiveness.</p> <p>The Pierce County Sheriff’s Department also saw an increase in homicides in 2022, albeit at a lower rate than in 2021, when killings surged from 15 the previous year to 24. In 2022, the department saw 25 homicides in its jurisdiction.</p> <p>“To be close to 2021 numbers means we’re still having a lot of homicides,” sheriff’s Sgt. Darren Moss said. “We need to be back around 15 to go back to normal.”</p> <p>Motives in last year’s homicides varied, but the two highest known causes were domestic violence and killings that stemmed from arguments or fights, with 10 each.</p> <p>The next-highest number (6) were drug-related killings, followed by homicides that occurred as a result of robberies or theft (3), including the April 30 fatal stabbing of Odessa Easterlin.</p>

Other violent crime is up in the county. Compared to yearly data from the past five years, armed robbery was up 71 percent, aggravated assault was up 28 percent, and rape was up 20 percent in 2022, according to crime stats shared by the Sheriff's Department.

Property crime also was up, including auto theft (96 percent), non-residential burglary (21 percent) and other thefts (18 percent). Deputies said residential burglary was down 17 percent and shoplifting was down 50 percent, but Moss attributed shoplifting's large decline to a decrease in reporting.

MORE MURDERS BUT SOLVE RATE IS DOWN

Police departments across the United States have experienced declining murder-clearance rates for decades. The Tacoma Police Department has historically had a high clearance rate, but it fell in 2022 to 71 percent from 87 percent in 2021.

That's the second-lowest clearance rate the department has had in nearly two decades, according to previous reporting from The News Tribune. The lowest was in 2017 when the department had 12 homicides to solve, and four weren't cleared by the end of the year, making the clearance rate 66 percent.

To consider a homicide cleared, police generally have to have a suspect in custody and charged, but police can sometimes clear a case if a suspect is identified. Of the 45 homicides that occurred in the city, four were police shootings investigated by the Pierce County Force Investigation Team, and one was a Dec. 6 death that the medical examiner had not yet ruled a homicide, but the police department is investigating it as one. So while Tacoma police have cleared 30 of the 42 homicides they investigated, only 29 cases have had arrests and charges filed.

"Tacoma detectives continue to pursue all avenues in their investigations into unsolved cases," police spokesperson Wendy Haddow told The News Tribune. "Anyone with information relating to any of these crimes are asked to call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS."

An arrest was made Thursday in one homicide that was not solved by the end of last year, the murder of Mason Hall, 30, found dead Dec. 12 with a gunshot wound to the chest.

The department is solving more murders overall, but more are occurring in the city. Staffing challenges also might be a factor in the clearance rate. In October, Police Chief Avery Moore said TPD had 118 officers to respond to calls when it's budgeted for 173 positions, resulting in overtime costs amounting to millions of dollars.

TPD remains above the national average for solving homicides. According to the Murder Accountability Project, which analyzes data collected from law enforcement agencies nationwide, 2021's clearance rate was 50.5 percent, the lowest on record.

The Sheriff's Department solved 13 of the 21 homicides it investigated for a clearance rate of 62 percent. Four of the 25 homicides in its jurisdiction were police shootings investigated by PCFIT. Aside from Puyallup, other police departments had a 100 percent solve rate last year. Lakewood had four homicides, and Steilacoom, Buckley and Fife each had one.

Puyallup police are still investigating the Nov. 30 fatal shooting of the owner of a barbershop. No arrests have been made, giving the department a clearance rate of zero. Spokesperson Capt. Ryan Portmann said detectives are asking anyone with information about the shooting to get in touch with police. "They are pursuing a variety of different angles," Portmann said of detectives. "There's work to be done, and they're actively working the case."

All 21 of the unsolved homicides in the county were shootings.

2022 UNSOLVED HOMICIDES IN TACOMA

- Feb. 5: Philip Mercado Mendoza, 37, was shot to death in a restaurant filled with customers.
- Feb. 19: Kavonte Crowley, 29, died after being brought to a local hospital with a gunshot wound.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 14: Michael Jones, 48, was fatally shot outside an Eastside business. • March 16: Steven Elmendorf, 61, was killed in a shooting outside his home. • April 12: Astina Messieur, 25, was fatally shot on South Hosmer Street. • April 20: Jusdon Mounts, 37, was fatally shot in a parked car on Hilltop. • April 28: Ta'ape Nunu, 41, was gunned down on the Eastside. • July 31: Tenisio Fiamate, 30, was killed in a shooting near Thea's Park that also injured another man. • Aug. 24: Nicholas Ahlstrand, 44, was shot and killed in Central Tacoma. • Sept. 1: Skyler Zimmerle, 29, was found dead after an overnight Eastside shooting. • Oct. 10: Jerry Williams-Reyes, 32, was killed in a shooting that also injured an 18-year-old woman. • Nov. 19: A 33-year-old man who has not been identified was killed in a shooting at a Stadium District gas station that also injured another man.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	01/17 Idaho murder suspect messaged a victim?
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/idaho-murders-suspect-bryan-kohberger-allegedly-spammed-one-victim-instagram-dms-report
GIST	<p>Bryan Kohberger, the criminology Ph.D. student accused of ambushing a group of University of Idaho undergrads in November, allegedly sent one of the four victims a series of private messages on Instagram before the slayings, according to a new report.</p> <p>"He slid into one of the girls' DMs several times, but she didn't respond," an unnamed investigator told People. "Basically, it was just him saying, 'Hey, how are you?' But he did it again and again."</p> <p>The FBI, which assisted Moscow, Idaho, police in trailing Kohberger from his apartment in Pullman, Washington, to his parents' house in Pennsylvania's Poconos Mountains, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Fox News Digital was unable to confirm the reporting independently. The new allegation comes as details around the case are subject to a gag order – and officials have made few public statements since Kohberger's arrest on Dec. 30.</p> <p>Kohberger reportedly sent the first message in late October – then a series of followups when he did not receive a response, according to People.</p> <p>On Nov. 13, 2022, police allege that he snuck into a six-bedroom rental house on King Road in Moscow, Idaho, and killed four students, at least some of whom who are believed to have been asleep at the start of the ambush.</p> <p>The victims, 21-year-old Kaylee Goncalves and Madison Mogen and 20-year-old Xana Kernodle and Ethan Chapin, include three young women who lived together and a visiting boyfriend.</p> <p>Shanon Gray, the attorney for Goncalves' parents, said "no one" knew about Kohberger before the slayings, however, he left open the possibility.</p> <p>"Any information any of the families gather regarding connections to any of the victims will be turned over to the Moscow Police Department," he told Fox News Digital.</p> <p>Police had previously been looking into whether Kohberger had stalked the victims prior to the slayings, according to court documents.</p> <p>Police allege that Kohberger, a student at the neighboring Washington State University just seven miles away, cased the victims' home at least 12 times prior to the murders. Then, just hours after the attack, police say they tracked Kohberger's phone back to the crime scene.</p>

	<p>Kohberger faces four counts of first-degree murder and a felony burglary charge for allegedly entering the home with intent to kill. He could face the death penalty if convicted.</p> <p>He is due back in court in June for a hearing in which his defense is expected to challenge the evidence used to obtain a warrant for his arrest.</p> <p>Two other housemates were not attacked – including one who allegedly heard crying from Kernodle's room and a man saying, "It's OK, I'm going to help you."</p> <p>A short while later, police say she saw a masked man with "bushy eyebrows" leaving through a sliding door.</p> <p>According to the police affidavit, Kohberger left behind a Ka-Bar knife sheath with DNA on the snap. Investigators recovered it in Mogen's bed, next to her body.</p> <p>Kohberger lived in an apartment in Pullman, Washington, where he was studying for a Ph.D. in the school's department of criminal justice and criminology. The campus is across the state line but only about 10 miles from the University of Idaho.</p> <p>He had allegedly been stalking the King Road home for weeks, according to the affidavit.</p>
Return to Top	

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